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Congregation of the Mission

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# The New Constitutions: 20 Years of Existence

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CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION  
GENERAL CURIA

# VINCENTIANA

*Magazine of the Congregation of the Mission  
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# GENERAL CURIA

Rome, September 27, 2000

*To the members of the Congregation of the Mission*

My very dear Brothers,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you!

I write today, with considerable excitement, to tell you about the first General Assembly of the International Vincentian Marian Youth Association. We held it here in Rome on August 8-12, just before World Youth Day. Delegates came from 44 countries, accompanied by Vincentians, Daughters of Charity, and others who serve as spiritual animators of the groups.

It was a wonderful experience. The atmosphere was very positive. The delegates elected the first International President and four lay members of an International Council. These are:

*Gladys Abi-Saïd, President (Lebanon)*

*Eduarne Urdampilleta (Spain)*

*Gloria del Carmen Santillán Martínez (Mexico)*

*Francisco José Lemos Pires (Portugal)*

*Ana Maria Jesus Escaño (Philippines)*

They also approved a document with Lines of Action to be implemented in each country over the next five years. I am enclosing a copy, knowing that it will be of great interest to you.

Since many Vincentians, Daughters of Charity, and other spiritual advisors to our youth groups were present at the Assembly as auditors, Fr. Benjamín Romo and I took the occasion to meet with them to discuss their role. At the conclusion of that meeting, we agreed to draw up a document describing the ministry of the spiritual advisors of our youth groups. I am more and more convinced of the importance of this role. Sixty-four percent of the world's population is under 25 years of age. Our ministry to this segment of society is crucial for the future of the Church and also for the spread of the Vincentian charism in the world.

Our youth groups are growing very rapidly. They now have hundreds of thousands of members. In the last year alone, I approved

National Statutes in 28 countries. A number of other countries are in the process of writing their statutes. The groups exist on all continents and over the last several years have known a remarkable growth especially in Asia and Africa.

The youth groups, as you know, were entrusted to us at the same time as the Miraculous Medal. Catherine Labouré told Fr. Aladel, her spiritual advisor:

*The Most Holy Virgin wants you to found an association of "Children of Mary." You will be its superior, and to you and its members abundant graces will be given.*

Repeatedly during our Assembly the young people asked our help in their formation. They yearn to assimilate the Vincentian charism more deeply and to grow in living out the spirituality of the Magnificat. I am convinced that the young members of JMV can be a powerful force in the evangelization and service of the poor in our countries.

Right after the JMV Assembly, I had the joy of participating, within the context of World Youth Day, in our own Vincentian Youth Meeting. From August 14-20, around 1800 young Vincentians, the vast majority of whom are members of JMV, SSVdP, AIC, and AMM, met here in Rome. They came from 50 countries. In a happy familial climate we shared moments of formation, prayer, and getting to know one another. With great enthusiasm many have now written to me recounting how this experience led them to a deeper understanding of and commitment to our Vincentian charism.

All of this would not have been possible without the labors and support of many Visitors and Visitatrices, Daughters of Charity, Vincentians, and lay volunteers. A Coordinating Commission worked for more than a year on all the preparations. I am very grateful to those who contributed so generously to the success of the General Assembly and the Vincentian Youth Meeting. I am delighted that the young members of our Family were able to share so much about their faith and their service of the poor. On a personal level, the meeting was a wonderful experience for me too.

I want to encourage Vincentians and Daughters of Charity throughout the world to form such groups wherever you serve and to assist them in their formation. I also urge our provincial superiors and the provincial assemblies to make the promotion and formation of our youth groups one of the top priorities for the future. The Church will be fully alive in the third millennium only if we help the young become well formed.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.  
Superior General

# First General Assembly of the Vincentian Marian Youth Association

Rome, August 8-12, 2000

## Final Document

### *A dream come true...*

After two years of preparation, hard work and reflection, we have now had the first General Assembly of the JMV. For five days we were able to share times of intensive prayer, study, reflection and living together, and we believe that we achieved the objectives we had in mind. All this is due to the powerful presence among us of the Holy Spirit whom we invoked over and over again as we prayed: "*Come Holy Spirit.*" Guided by this same Spirit, our Assembly elected its first International Council and set out the Association's Lines of Action for the next five years. These events left a deep impression on our minds and hearts.

It is not easy to communicate, in all its depths, the richness of the experiences we had together, but these all lead us to declare that our Association is a gift for the Church and for the world in this new millennium. We were able to get to know one another and discover our values. The diversity of cultures among us became a source of enrichment. This was particularly evident in our Eucharistic celebrations, our group work and the time we spent together.

The message of rue du Bac, which led to the setting up of our Association, is still relevant and it is a living force urging us to be witnesses to Christ the Servant, following the example of Mary, St. Vincent de Paul and St. Catherine Labouré. This message is in our hands and we have been sent to show the world, through our works, that God is love and that Mary is the reflection of God's tenderness.

When our Assembly was over, we returned to our different countries, our hearts full of love, hope and enthusiasm, and ready to continue our wonderful JMV journey together in this Association which is now established in more than 40 countries. As well as sharing with you the joy felt by our new international co-ordinating team, we address to you this message of hope:

*Dear Friends, brothers and sisters,*

We bring you this good news: yes, there is a path that we can all travel together in the new millennium. We have been dreaming about for the Association over the next five years:

In the light of the message given us in each conference, and inspired by the reflection of all the members of the Assembly, we thought it necessary to concentrate on the *seven topics* we judged to be the most important. For each topic we drew up some simple and specific *Lines of Action*, and together with you, the Association's members, we wish to implement these in the next five years so that we can do still more and be a prophetic force that can transform the world.

## 1. Spiritual Life

*Our hope is that we will be able to support one another by our daily prayer, and that this prayer will be something beautiful for God and attractive to young people.*

1. We will make prayer an integral part of our catechetical and formation meetings and of our apostolate, service and evangelisation, so that prayer will become a natural and spontaneous part of our lives.
2. The International Secretariat, in collaboration with the International Council, will compile a book of prayers for all Association members. This is to help us preserve the spirit of common prayer and so reinforce our sense of belonging to the Association. All countries will be asked to contribute their own prayer material for this project.

## 2. Formation

*The initial and ongoing formation of the Association's members is of vital importance: it is the key factor in our faith journey.*

1. The International Council and International Secretariat will draw up the general outline for the various stages of formation. Each National Council will develop these in concrete ways according to the circumstances and needs of its Association. This national formation programme will be particularly concerned with the human, ecclesial, missionary, Marian and Vincentian dimensions of membership.
2. The International Secretariat and the National Councils will be committed to producing creative material suitable for formation programmes. This material will be shared and it should be simple, concrete and attractive, so that it will help us in the formation of the Association's members.

3. In our formation programmes we will be very mindful of the social dimension of life so that we can help our members to develop a critical and prophetic understanding of events. We will analyze reality from our Marian and Vincentian perspective: this will inspire us to look for specific forms of service and ways of registering prophetic protest.
4. At all levels of the Association we will encourage our counsellors, formators and leaders to commit themselves to personal and ongoing formation so that they will become for us true guides and prophets.

### 3. Mary and the Association

*Mary leads us to Christ. She invites us to love in the way that He loved. From her we learn humility, simplicity and tenderness in order to become instruments of love in the service of others.*

1. We will base our Marian spirituality on the canticle of the *Magnificat*, which invites us to live in joyful thanksgiving to God for the wonders of salvation.
2. Inspired by this *Magnificat* canticle we will make a clear option for God who is the only Absolute, and we will take our place among the poor, for this is the "milieu" in which we will be living out our commitment to God.
3. We will promote and inculcate a deeper understanding of the Act of Consecration, the sign that we belong to the Association. All National Associations will use the same formula for this Act of Consecration.
4. The International Council, as well as the National Associations, will produce material for prayer and for study that will help us to give young people a deeper understanding of the message of *rue du Bac* and its relevance today, so as to promote devotion to Our Lady through use of the Miraculous Medal.

### 4. Life Witness

*Our mission today is to be a critical and prophetic presence, to be people who will spread the good news and be a transforming force in organisations that confront the different forms of poverty in our society.*

1. In fulfilling our mission we will proclaim the gospel and, as prophets, denounce injustice, first and foremost by the testimony of our lives and the way that we live in accordance with gospel

values. We will be faithful to the Marian and Vincentian virtues that should characterise our lives: simplicity, humility and practical charity.

2. As members of the Association we will tie together our Christian vocation and our social commitment in a single experience of faith and life.

## 5. Service-Mission

*The prophetic young person is someone who is sent to evangelise the poor, to help the weak, set free the oppressed, bring down tyranny and defend justice. In this way we will strive to help people, especially all those who are in difficult situations, to be the agents of their own development, to live in dignity, and to know that God loves them.*

1. We will encourage all the members of the Association to make their apostolate one of organised service as part of the Church, in co-operation with other pastoral workers, and in direct contact with the poor.
2. We will look for ways of becoming more and more involved in social action and thus be a force that can denounce unjust structures in our society.
3. We will draw up projects for service and for the apostolate that will help us to reach out to young people, especially those who are at risk.

## 6. Internationality

*We have to be open to other realities and be enriched by them so that we can create one single human family that will benefit from the positive aspects globalisation has to offer.*

1. We will work at securing approval for our National Statutes in those countries where the Association is already established.
2. We will try, with the help of the International Council, to find ways of setting up the Association in countries where it does not yet exist. In doing this we will rely on the strong support of the Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of the Mission, as well as that of other religious or priests who promote the Association.
3. We will be open and ready to go wherever God and the poor are calling us to evangelise and to proclaim God's kingdom, and we will be prepared to go beyond our national frontiers in order to do this.



4. We will set up an economic solidarity fund with contributions from helping agencies and from National Associations, in so far as this is possible. This will help us to collaborate in helping the poor in emergency situations and in aid-projects for Associations that need our help.
5. We will generate interest in the Association by our frequent use of the JMV Web page as well as that of the International Vincentian Family.

## 7. JMV and the Vincentian Family

*God calls us to serve and to evangelise the poor through effective and practical charity, regarding ourselves as members of one and the same Family which shares its gifts and places them at the service of the poor.*

1. The National Associations will join with the Vincentian Family to form a National Co-ordinating Committee so that we can join forces and channel our energies in order to serve the poor better.
2. The National or Regional Councils will participate with other branches of the Vincentian Family, in drawing up, implementing and evaluating projects for formation and for the service of the poor.
3. All members of the Association will be prepared to get to know the other branches of the Vincentian Family and to collaborate with them in mutual support. The National Councils will communicate with the other branches periodically.

*We confide the Association to Mary, our only Mother, and we also place in her hands these "Lines of Action" which, with God's grace, we hope to see implemented in all our members in each of our countries:*

***"O Mary conceived without sin,  
pray for us who have recourse to You."***

Rome, October 15, 2000

*To the members of the Congregation of the Mission*

My very dear Confreres,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you!

I am very happy to announce today that, after much consultation and with the unanimous consent of the members of the General Council, I have just signed a decree establishing a new vice-province encompassing our houses in the Ukraine, Byelorussia, and Russia. It will be called the Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, with its seat of government in Kiev. I have just launched the consultation for the naming of the new Vice-Visitor.

As you recall, the General Assembly of 1992 made the following pledge:

*Our Congregation commits itself in Eastern Europe to at least one missionary project as a concrete sign of our community's participation in New Evangelization.*

I think of it as a grace that the response of the confreres over the past eight years far surpassed the expectations of the Assembly of 1992. As you probably know, the mission in Albania, which the Congregation undertook as an immediate response to the decree of the General Assembly of 1992, is now a Region dependent on the Province of Naples. Besides the confreres, there are now also a large number of Daughters of Charity working there.

Today we have 20 members of the Congregation laboring in the Ukraine, Byelorussia, and Russia, along with a number of communities of the Daughters of Charity. Two Vincentians have already been ordained from the territory of the new Vice-Province. Several more ordinations will take place in the next few years, and other candidates follow these.

In this case it is certainly true, as St. Vincent liked to say, that "I never thought of this idea, nor did Monsieur Portail, nor did Mademoiselle LeGras. It was God who created...." By the gift of God, the idea and the energy for the creation of the vice-province came through confreres of the region itself and from the Visitors of Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia, who have been so generous in sending missionaries to the Ukraine, Byelorussia, and Russia.

I ask your support and prayers for those engaged directly in this new beginning. I thank God for the gifts that he has given the Congregation in this missionary thrust toward the East and, by this letter, I simply want to share with you this good news.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

Superior General

Rome, October 15, 2000

*To the members of the Congregation of the Mission  
throughout the world*

My very dear Brothers,

May the grace and peace of God Our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you!

Today I am writing, as I do each year, to make an appeal for volunteers to serve in our new international missions as well as to meet other urgent missionary needs.

I am happy to say that we had a resurgence of volunteers over the past year, so that we were able to build up several of our missions with additional personnel. I am deeply grateful to all those who offered their services so generously. I am also very grateful to the Visitors who, often at considerable sacrifice to their home province, encourage confreres in their desire to serve in other places where the needs are so urgent. Besides their help to the international missions, many provinces, both older and newer ones, continue to develop their own long-existing missions *ad gentes* and have also opened new ones. I can only rejoice that the missionary thrust of the Congregation is strong.

Below I offer some news briefs about the missions and then make several appeals.

## NEWS BRIEFS ABOUT THE MISSIONS

- **Mozambique** – As I have often written, this vice-province is one of our neediest missions. During the past year Jorge Pedroza, from the Province of Mexico, was named provincial. After consulting the confreres he decided to undertake a complete revision of the works of the province in order to regroup the confreres and to work at strengthening community living within a very busy missionary context. Recently, Miguel Renes, who formerly served as Visitor in Madrid and then as a missionary in Cuba, was assigned here.

Besides the vice-province, *I am also very concerned about the mission in Nacala* which until now has been staffed by the Province of Salamanca. Fr. Manuel Canal continues there bravely, but alone, along with a group of lay volunteers from MISEVI. Nacala is extremely poor and rather isolated. One of our confreres, Germano Grachane, is the bishop of the diocese.

Since Salamanca can no longer provide personnel, the Visitor has appealed to me for help. I would not like to abandon this mission since it is a wonderful missionary setting where the confreres and the lay JMV volunteers have labored nobly. I would be very happy to have volunteers. I have already appealed to the Visitors' Conference of Africa and Madagascar for assistance and am awaiting a response.

- **Solomon Islands** – All of us were shocked at the sudden death of Rafael Sucaldito. While he was waiting in Australia to return to the Solomons, where a civil war had broken out, doctors diagnosed that Ralph had leukemia. He died nine days later. Ralph was an outgoing, energetic, generous confrere who gave most of his life to the formation of the clergy. We will all sorely miss him. Meanwhile, the civil war forced the interruption of studies at the seminary. The students were all sent home. I admire the courage of Marcelo Manimtim and Jack Harris, as well as the sisters who work at the seminary, in remaining there all during the strife, especially since fighting was taking place right around our seminary. As I write, there is a cease fire, which is being rather poorly observed. Marek Owskiak has been assigned to the seminary. Marek is heading for Australia to continue his study of English.
- **China** – Last November, I joined with the confreres of the Province of China in celebrating the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the first Vincentian missionaries there. It was a wonderful occasion. A very large number of bishops, priests, brothers, sisters, and lay men and women joined in the Eucharistic celebrations and in conferences that focused on our mission in China both in the past, present, and future. I was also delighted to spend most of one day with the newly established Vincentian Marian Youth groups in Taiwan. These groups have sprung up only recently and have grown rapidly, through the labors of the Daughters of Charity and the confreres. A delegation of young people came from China for the First JMV General Assembly here in Rome this past August.
- **Rwanda and Burundi** – Thanks to the generosity of the Province of Colombia, six confreres have now been assigned to Rwanda and Burundi. Gabriel Naranjo, the Visitor of the Province of Colombia, returned recently from a visit there. He and I spoke at length about conditions in the country, where the poverty is terrible and where the effects of years of violence are still evident. The confreres serving there are very happy. They continue to work at learning both French and the local languages. The people themselves are delighted to have them. The confreres live very simply and maintain a strong community life while serving in various mission stations. They also accompany the Daughters of Charity in both countries.

- **Bolivia** – I am happy to say that we were able to assign two new confreres to the mission there: Franc Pavlič from Slovenia and Aníbal Vera from Peru. Both already speak Spanish. I hope that, upon their arrival, we can consolidate our community in two centers: El Alto itself and Italaque, from which the confreres engage in missionary outreach to many villages. It is wonderful to see that we now have a number of Bolivian candidates for the Congregation of the Mission. We have approved plans for the construction of a small residence for our students and a contract has also been drawn up with the Province of Chile which will assist in our students' philosophical and theological formation. From the beginning, the mission in El Alto has not been easy. I am very grateful to the confreres who have served there for their courage and patience.
- **Albania** – In April, Albania was erected as a Region depending on the Province of Naples, but with a contract among the three Italian Visitors with various provisions for maintaining its interprovincial character. A new house of formation was just inaugurated in Scutari. Our young Albanian candidates will live there and will attend the interdiocesan seminary. Fr. Cristoforo Palmieri was named Apostolic Administrator of Rrëshen by the Holy See. The confreres and several communities of Daughters of Charity continue to collaborate generously in pastoral work and assistance to the poor both in Albania and Kosovo.
- **Kharkov, Ukraine** – We have just created a new Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius encompassing the confreres serving in the Ukraine, Byelorussia, and Russia. At Kharkov, work continues on the construction of a social and pastoral center. A large group of faithful take part regularly in Sunday Mass. The three confreres have catechetical classes for children, adolescents, and adults. They also offer bible study sessions and prayer groups. Many activities are carried out in collaboration with AIC and Caritas.
- **Siberia** – The confreres on this mission, which will now be part of the Vice-Province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, communicate with us frequently here in Rome and seem very united and happy. The Daughters of Charity from Slovakia have now arrived to accompany them. The confreres and the Daughters are investigating the possibility of founding an orphanage since there are so many street-children. Another group of Daughters of Charity from Poland went to Kazakhstan.
- **Cuba** – The confreres here continue to serve very generously in difficult circumstances. During the past year it was necessary for Miguel Renes and Alvaro Mauricio Fernández to leave the country. Happily, José María Mondéjar and Francisco Quintero were able to enter. Other confreres go for periods of one to three months to help too. In August, I was delighted that Fr. Jesús

María Lusarreta was able to come to the first General Assembly of the JMV with two young lay representatives from Cuba.

- **Tanzania** – Two new confreres, James Kunninpurayidam and Jaimy Moonjely, arrived recently from India to serve in this mission. They have just completed a course in Swahili. Two more have been promised for next year. Fr. Myles Rearden has finished his generous service to the sisters as spiritual director and has now returned to the Province of Ireland. Jose Manjaly replaced Myles. Fr. Manuel Prado had to leave the mission for health reasons and has returned to the Province of Puerto Rico.
- **Algeria** – Dariusz Górski has now joined François Hiss, Firman Mola Mbalo, and Christian Mauvais in the house in Algiers, which is now an interprovincial house of the two French provinces.
- **Papua New Guinea** – Rolando Santos is going to the seminary there in January as a spiritual director.
- **Haiti** – In response to an appeal from the Visitor of Puerto Rico, we were also able to send two confreres to the mission in Haiti, Jaroslaw Lawrenz and Stanislaw Szczepanik.

## FIRST APPEAL

As I mentioned last year, our main priority now in the General Council is to strengthen the missions that we have already begun. We were able to do that in a number of instances over the past year. Only as those missions become consolidated will we attempt to respond to other appeals that we receive from bishops throughout the world. These, as you might imagine, are many.

Some of our most urgent needs at the moment are the following:

- **Mozambique** – Above I described the urgent need we have in the Vice-Province of Mozambique and, to the north, in the mission at Nacala. Few countries have suffered as much as Mozambique. Years of civil war devastated its infrastructures. This year, terrible floods killed many people and wiped out significant resources in the country. The confreres, along with the Daughters of Charity, continue to serve there with courage in spite of these difficulties, but they need help. I am very eager to aid them.
- **Solomon Islands** – Ralph Sucaldito's death left a big gap at the seminary in the Solomons. We would still like to set up a missionary parish there in addition to the seminary. I would be happy to be able to send two more confreres.
- **China** – Several of those teaching English on the mainland have completed their time of service. My visit to the mainland last

year impressed on me the importance of this apostolate. The commitment is for one, two, or three years. I would be very grateful to have volunteers.

- **Cuba** – I mentioned above how difficult life still is for the confreres. I just received an urgent appeal from the Visitor asking for two confreres to replace those who had to leave the country. The names of these confreres would be placed on the waiting list which he must prepare for the government in view of a visa.
- **South Africa** – On the day of the canonization of Francis Regis Clet, I received an appeal from the Holy See asking if we could provide spiritual directors either for the major seminary or for a pre-seminary formation program. The language is English. The commitment is for three years, renewal for another three. Knowing how important the work of the formation of the clergy is in the Vincentian tradition, I would be very happy if we could respond to this appeal.
- **Chad** – Archbishop Charles Vandame from N'Djamena in Chad came to see me and appealed for help in establishing a small mission team in a rural area that has a large Muslim population. French is the basic language of the country, but Arabic is used more and more and there are also many local African languages. The Daughters of Charity from the Province of San Sebastián in Spain have just opened a mission in Chad.
- **Iran** – Lazare de Gérin is alone there. The languages used are French and Persian. I would be delighted if some volunteers could accompany Lazare. Unfortunately, however, it is hard to obtain permission to enter the country.
- **Papua New Guinea** – The Holy See, as well as the bishops of Papua New Guinea, continue to ask me for help in the seminary there. Volunteers could form a team with Rolando Santos who has already been assigned there.
- **Angola** – I would still love to send a few confreres to accompany the Daughters of Charity in this very poor country, where we already have candidates for the Congregation of the Mission (even though we are not yet there!). The bishop has invited us to come. The language is Portuguese.
- **Hungary** – Our little Province of Hungary continues to struggle ahead bravely in spite of limited personnel and meager resources. The elderly Hungarian confreres are more and more limited in what they can do apostolically. The four younger confreres who have arrived from Poland and Slovakia are laboring very hard to restructure the works of the province and renovate houses that suffered abuse and neglect during the long period of oppression. The Visitor asks help in terms of volunteers and economic assistance.



Those are some of our principal needs. I would be very happy if we could send volunteers to meet them. Those interested will find, enclosed, a sheet of instructions with the procedures to be used for volunteering.

## SECOND APPEAL

As you know, we are continuing to build up the International Mission Fund, IMF: 2000-2004. The confreres and provinces have been wonderfully generous in contributing to it. This past year, since we were able to use the interest from the Mary Immaculate Seminary International Seminary Fund and, for the first time, from IMF: 2000, the amount of money that we were able to distribute to our missions and poorest provinces increased very significantly.

I am immensely grateful to the provinces and confreres who have now pledged or are already making generous donations to IMF: 2000-2004. This past year several more provinces added their names to the list of regular contributors. This is encouraging not just to me, but to our poor provinces and missions as well. I deeply appreciate these donations.

My appeal is straightforward. I ask you, with as much simplicity as I can, to reflect on whether you as an individual can make a contribution, small or large, to IMF: 2000-2004. I also ask each of the Visitors to discuss with the members of your council whether your province might be able to make a contribution, small or large. I am enclosing a sheet that will provide you with instructions as to how this can be done.

That is the news and those are my two appeals. Thank you for the wonderful missionary spirit that has been evidenced by the number of volunteers over the past years and by the financial contributions that so many individuals and provinces have made.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

Superior General

## **IMF: 2000-2004**

### **Methods for Making a Contribution**

#### **Provincial Contributions**

1. Checks made payable to: "Congregazione della Missione" and with "Deposit Only" written on the back. These should be sent to:

Elmer Bauer III, C.M.  
Econome General  
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2. For Italy and France, the CCP account can be used following exactly the information in the Catalogue, page 1.
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1. Checks made payable to: "Congregazione della Missione" and with "Deposit Only" written on the back, sent to the address above.
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#### **In every case**

1. All gifts received will be acknowledged.
2. If your contribution is not acknowledged in a reasonable time, please contact us for clarification.
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Advent 2000

*To the members of the Congregation of the Mission*

My very dear Confreres,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with you!

Over the last several years, we have meditated together on the striking cast of characters that walk across the Advent stage: Mary the Mother of Jesus, listening attentively to the word of God and responding to it; Joseph her husband, peering into the transcendent darkness with faith; John the Baptist, crying out with a herald's voice and preparing the way of the Lord; the Magi, seeking life's ultimate meaning and following their star; the shepherds, symbolizing the poor, receiving and proclaiming the good news of the coming of the Lord. But, as in most great dramas, there are other elements besides the cast that enliven the scene. This year, let me highlight two: song and silence.

1. *The Advent Songs*

Luke provides us with four canticles which have become a daily part of Christian liturgical prayer: the Magnificat (1:39-56); the Benedictus (1:67-79), the Gloria in Excelsis (2:13-14), and the Nunc Dimittis (2:28-32). We sing these songs from the infancy narratives so often that it is easy to forget their origin. They are Advent songs, proclamations of liberation, hymns of praise for the wonderful works of God.

For lack of space, let me comment briefly only on the first of the canticles, the Magnificat. It is really a duet. In a vividly colorful scene, Luke brings Mary and Elizabeth together for the event that we call "the Visitation." Filled with the language and faith of the prophets and conscious of the dawn of a new era, they occupy center-stage like sopranos in an opera by Verdi and sing the praises of God, while John the Baptist leaps with joy in his mother's womb (Luke uses the verb for sheep leaping in a field). The evangelist tells us that both singers are filled with the Holy Spirit, so they sing!

Mary's canticle is much more famous than her cousin's, but Elizabeth's song too is of great importance, since it highlights a fundamental theme in Luke's gospel, repeated again and again: "Blessed is she who believed that the Lord's words to her would be fulfilled." Luke states this same thesis in other places: Mary, the ideal

disciple, listens to the word of God, meditates on it, and puts it into practice (cf. 1:38, 8:21, 11:27-28).

The Magnificat is a mosaic of Old Testament passages. It proclaims God's greatness with exuberant joy and confidence, and, in poetic language, capsulizes Luke's point of view. It expresses his radical faith that God turns the world upside-down. This song, so popular among the oppressed today, is a freedom cry. It gives voice to the piety of the poor of Israel, the lowly, the sick, the downtrodden, the widows, the orphans, those who cannot trust in their own strength and have come to rely in utter confidence on God. Mary's canticle is like an overture, introducing in musical language right at the beginning of the gospel the fundamental themes that underlie the faith of the humble, now focused on Jesus. For Luke, Jesus comes blessing the outcasts, the famished, the marginalized, the persecuted (6:20-22); he himself is persecuted and slain (23:32-49); yet he entrusts himself into God's hands (23:46) and God, faithful to his servant, raises him up and exalts him as savior (Acts 5:31), coming, as promised, from David's posterity (Acts 13:23). One can imagine the abandoned, the refugees, the captives, the slaves, the hungry of Luke's day — and surely of our own day too — identifying their sufferings with those of their slain but risen Lord and singing a song of hopeful liberation: "God has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty."

It is my own experience — Advent always reminds me of this — that we carry our faith and hope "in earthen vessels" (2 Cor 4:7). We sing our liberation songs at times with confidence but often with doubts and fears. St. Augustine, in a wonderful reading that the Church has placed in the liturgy of the hours, encourages us:

*Let us sing alleluia here on earth, while we still live in anxiety, so that we may sing it one day in heaven in full security.... God's praises are sung both there and here, but here they are sung in anxiety, there in security; here they are sung by those destined to die, there by those destined to live forever; here they are sung in hope, there in hope's fulfillment; here, they are sung by wayfarers, there, by those living in their own country. So then... let us sing now... sing as wayfarers do — sing, but continue your journey.... Sing then, but keep going.*

I encourage you to sing the Magnificat, the Benedictus, the Gloria in Excelsis, and the Nunc Dimittis humbly, gratefully, and with exuberant hope this Advent. Sing these canticles too with the poor.

## 2. *Silence*

In the Lucan infancy narrative, it is remarkable how little is said apart from the hymns. At the birth of the Lord, Mary and Joseph are silent. They contemplate this great mystery in quiet awe while the angels sing God's praises.

Our contemporary world is hardly a tranquil one. In fact, there is often so much noise that it is difficult to hear. Radio, television, computer games, cell phones and beepers can easily rob us of the peace we need to listen to the word of God. Many confreres, especially those living in third world countries, tell me that they long for quiet moments, often in vain, in the midst of the deafening din that surrounds them daily.

Silence is a creative medium, a quality of heart, an inner space where genuine listening can take place and where the Word can take root. Most founders of communities sought to create quiet oases where their members could open their hearts to the mystery of God. St. Vincent was no exception. He urged us to carve out silent time together each morning so that in meditative prayer we might open our ears to the heartbeat of God and to the groans of the poor, both of which are often muffled by the noise of daily living. He asked us to create quiet space in the evenings — in the chapel, in our rooms, anywhere where the whispered urgings of God's word and the inner gnawing of his presence can find peaceful receptivity.

In a missionary community it is easy to fall into the trap of being constantly in movement, always busy and trying rather desperately to respond to the countless needs of those we serve. But when that is the constant rhythm of our lives, we easily become deaf to the deepest voices of reality, to the more radical issues that the poor are raising, or to the inescapable questions churning around within ourselves. In fact, sometimes frantic activity is an unconscious escape from such challenges.

This Advent I encourage you to re-invent times of creative silence. Do not be afraid to be alone with God or with yourself. Do not hesitate even to step back from the poor — perhaps this is the harder task for a missionary — in order to hear their unarticulated pleas, to contemplate the mysterious advent of God in human history precisely on behalf of the most abandoned, and to return to serve them enriched and renewed. Christianity, as well as other great religious traditions like Hinduism and Buddhism, have always given great importance to the practice of silent meditation. It is one of the key elements in the spirituality that St. Vincent has handed down to us. I encourage you to support one another in being faith-filled meditators, like Mary and Joseph in the accounts of the birth of Jesus.

This Advent I pray that the silence of the infancy narratives will teach us, in the words of Paul VI, "inwardness, the disposition to

listen to good inspirations and the teaching of good masters... the value of preparation, of study, of meditation, of personal inner life, of the prayer which God alone sees in secret."

And out of the richness of meditative silence may we, like Mary, sing songs of liberation at the side of the poor.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.

Superior General

# 1999 ANNUAL STATISTICS - CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION MINISTRIES

*Number of confreres involved in the ministries listed below. Each confrere is counted only once, considered under his principal ministry.*

MINISTRY	PRIESTS	PERMANENT DEACONS	BROTHERS
1. Parish (popular) Missions to the faithful	133		7
2. Missionary parishes or districts	203		4
3. Parishes	843	2	18
4. Pilgrimage sanctuaries	48		7
5. Seminaries and clerical formation	143		2
6. Formation of our own exclusively	208		7
7. Missions Ad Gentes	186		6
8. Daughters of Charity (Director, chaplain)	128		
9. Schools (primary, secondary, superior, professional)	206	1	16
10. Social Communications (publications, radio, television)	26		
11. Special studies	95		3
12. Chaplains: military, immigrants, hospital, associations	202		1
13. Chaplains: Vincentian Lay Groups	55		
14. Direct Service of the Poor	26		8
15. Manual work	6	1	62
16. Administration	131	1	11
17. Retired, ill, convalescing	305		35
18. Absence from the Congregation	103	1	3
19. Other	126		6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3173</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>196</b>

PROVINCE	HOUSES & INCORPORATED MEMBERS BY PROVINCE - 1999							ADMITTED MEMBERS AND ASPIRANTS BY PROVINCE - 1999												
	Houses	Bishops	Priests	Permanent Deacons	Brothers	Students with Vows	TOTAL	ADMITTED MEMBERS					ASPIRANTS							
								P*	PD*	CP	CB	TOTAL	Voc. Grps.		Minor Sem.		Prep. Yr.		TOTAL	
													TP	TB	TP	TB	TP	TB		
General Curia	6		7				7													
AFRICA	37	4	219		10	27	260					117								118
Congo	6		34		1	3	38			21	2	23	10	2				7	3	22
Ethiopia	4	2	31		1		34			22	3	25			22					22
Madagascar	9	1	70		4	3	78			21	5	26	14	3				5		22
Mozambique	6	1	13		2	1	17			4		4	10					12		22
Nigeria	6		35		1	5	41			38		38	10					13	1	24
St. Justin de Jacobis	6		36		1	15	52			1		1			6					6
NORTH AMERICA	86	1	494	2	41	7	545					32								43
Mexico	21	1	85		4	7	97			18		18			35					35
Eastern (USA)	24		175		12		187			10	1	11						6		6
Midwest (USA)	17		126		18		144			1		1						2		2
New England (USA)	8		32		4		36					0								0
Southern (USA)	5		29		1		30					0								0
West (USA)	11		47	2	2		51			2		2								0
LATIN AMERICA	427	14	632	1	36	44	727					135								670
Argentina	10		44	1		1	46			9	1	10						6		6
Curitiba (Brazil)	9	3	59		3	9	74			9		9	125		11			5		141
Fortaleza (Brazil)	3		34			6	40			9		9	30	3				6		39



Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)	12	4	71		9	5	89			15		15	35	6	20	1	8		70
Central America	11	4	40		3		47			9		9	5	2	7		4		18
Chile	6		25		1	1	27			7	2	9	8	2					10
Colombia	22	2	131		14	7	154			33		33	280	5	19				304
Costa Rica	5		17		2	1	20			3		3	1						1
Cuba	3		11				11					0					2		2
Ecuador	6		29			7	36			12		12					5		5
Peru	12	1	55		1	2	59			5		5					2		2
Puerto Rico	14		53		2	4	59			15	4	19	40		20				60
Venezuela	14		63		1	1	65	1			1	2	12						12
<b>ASIA</b>	<b>57</b>	<i>3+Pat</i>	<b>357</b>		<i>16</i>	<i>11</i>	<b>388</b>					<b>129</b>							<b>176</b>
China	5	1	42		2		45	4		1		5							0
Northern India	11	1	65		4		70			28		28			73				73
Southern India	9		60		2		62			30		30			37				37
Indonesia	11		75				75			42	1	43			10		4		14
Orient	8	Pat	40		3	2	46			5		5			15		2		17
Philippines	13	1	75		5	9	90			17	1	18					35		35
<b>EUROPE</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1408</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>1549</b>					<b>152</b>							<b>105</b>
Austria	5		17		4	1	22				1	1							0
Belgium	3		10				10					0							0
Paris (France)	20		109		10	6	125			84	1	85					6		6
Toulouse (France)	15		73		8	3	84			3		3							0
Germany	4		14		2		16			1		1							0
Hungary	3		12		1		13			5	1	6	7						7
Ireland	15		94				94					0							0

PROVINCE	HOUSES & INCORPORATED MEMBERS BY PROVINCE - 1999							ADMITTED MEMBERS AND ASPIRANTS BY PROVINCE - 1999												
	Houses	Bishops	Priests	Permanent Deacons	Brothers	Students with Vows	TOTAL	ADMITTED MEMBERS					ASPIRANTS							
								P*	PD*	CP	CB	TOTAL	Voc. Grps.		Minor Sem.		Prep. Yr.		TOTAL	
													TP	TB	TP	TB	TP	TB		
Naples (Italy)	14	1	59		2		62			1		1	5						5	
Rome (Italy)	9	1	59	1	3		64			1		1			1				1	
Turin (Italy)	14		90	1	5	1	97				1	1							0	
Netherlands	6		62		3		65					0							0	
Poland	31	3	260		6	12	281			7		7							0	
Portugal	11	1	54		2	4	61			6		6	4		1		10		15	
Slovakia	7		28		3	8	39			18	2	20	5	2			2	1	10	
Slovenia	9	1	50		4	1	56			7		7							0	
Barcelona (Spain)	10		52		2		54			4	1	5	2						2	
Madrid (Spain)	19		140		17	3	160			2		2			53				53	
Salamanca (Spain)	21		98		12		110			2		2							0	
Zaragoza (Spain)	21		127	1	4	4	136			4		4			6				6	
OCEANIA	9		56		5		61					12							2	
Australia	9		56		5		61			12		12	2						2	
TOTAL	559	29 + Pat	3173	6	196	132	3537	5	0	542	30	577	605	25	336	1	142	5	1114	

P\* = Priests; PD\* = Permanent Deacons; CP = Candidates to the Priesthood; CB = Candidates to the Brotherhood; \* Priests or permanent deacons coming from a diocese or another Institute; TP = Aspirants to the Priesthood; TB = Aspirants to the Brotherhood.

# FEATURE:

*The New Constitutions:  
20 Years of Existence*



# Sixteen years ago...

*by Richard McCullen, C.M.*

*Province of Ireland*

1. The celebration of the feasts of Sts. Peter and Paul during this year of the great Jubilee marks the 16<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the approbation of our Constitutions and Statutes. Almost as many years had been devoted to their preparation by the Congregation in a process of reflection, prayer, and discussion that took place in Domestic, Provincial and General Assemblies over that period of time. The length of time in itself is an indication of how seriously the Congregation took up the task that was given to each Order, Congregation and Institute in the Church by the Holy See after the Second Vatican Council; namely, to express anew the particular charism which the Spirit of God had given to it through its Founder. Our Congregation, as others also, faced the task of adapting the expression of that charism to the changed circumstances in which the we find ourselves today — different in so many respects from those of 17<sup>th</sup> century France.
2. It must have been about 16 years ago too since I listened to Cardinal Lustiger address a meeting of Visitatrixes in the rue du Bac on their particular mission in the Church. Many people, remarked the Cardinal, ask the question "What would St. Vincent do today if he were with us?" The Cardinal somewhat startled his audience by saying that the question was a rather inane one. Conditions of life, structures in society, modern thinking were all markedly different from those current in 17<sup>th</sup> century France, thus making it impossible to say with certainty what St. Vincent would do today. Undoubtedly he would direct his gaze — and ours — to the poor of today. "Seek out the poor in your society, serve them, proclaim the good news of our crucified and risen Christ to them, for have we not the word of our Saviour that the poor will always be with us," might be as much as he would say. By going beyond that and descending to specifics, and claiming with certainty that St. Vincent would adopt this or that apostolate, we might simply be projecting our own ideas on the saint, which he might not necessarily endorse. Cardinal Lustiger went on to point out to the sisters that their recently approved Constitutions were not only an encapsulation of the spirit with which St. Vincent and St. Louise would wish them to serve the poor, but that the articles of the Constitutions and Statutes were sound direction finders to the

particular forms of the apostolate they should take up at the present time.

3. The consecrated life is both an historical as well as a theological reality. Historical and cultural changes bring about evolution in the lived reality of the consecrated life. What forms and direction the evolution takes will, of course, always be determined by the essential elements of the consecrated life — such as the call of God, mission, the evangelical counsels, community life, personal and community prayer. Without these the consecrated life loses its identity. The Constitutions and Statutes are at once the expression of the specific charism of a Congregation as well the guardians of its unity and of its particular identity in the Church.
4. The preservation of the unity of a Congregation in a world that accepts and respects diversity of cultures is a particularly delicate and formidable challenge. The unity in question will be conditioned by the mind of Christ and by those particular evangelical values that St. Vincent saw as essential and perennial for the achieving of the end of his Congregation — the evangelization of the poor. It is a unity that is rooted in and inherent in the ideals and demands of the four vows which condition and colour the Congregation's approach to its mission of evangelizing the poor. It is a unity that transcends human powers, a fact that was recognised by St. Vincent, when in 1646 he remarked, *"Be united and God will bless you, but let it be through the charity of Jesus Christ, because any other union that is not cemented by the blood of this divine Saviour cannot last. It is, then, in Jesus Christ, through Jesus Christ and for Jesus Christ that you must be united one with the other."*<sup>1</sup>
5. The body of our Constitutions and Statutes set out the broad but essential conditions for the preservation of that unity without which the Congregation would cease to be an effective force at a local and international level. To quote St. Vincent's homely simile: *"Acting otherwise you would be like horses yoked to a plough, one pulls in one direction, another in another, and so everything is spoiled and ruined."*<sup>2</sup> The promotion and development of the international missions in recent years have been facilitated by the unity existing in the Congregation and which our present Constitutions and Statutes have contributed to preserving and fostering.

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<sup>1</sup> DODIN, *Entretiens*, 93-94.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

6. Our Constitutions and Statutes of 1984 are designed to shape and preserve our identity in the Church of today. The Congregation is a great deal more than a merely juridical entity or personality. It is a creation of the Spirit of God and it lives in the Church with an amalgam of special qualities and charisms which, when faithfully expressed, build up the body of Christ in the local Church. Karl Barth used to emphasize the importance for all preachers of "putting themselves under the word" before preaching. Analogously it can be said that it is all-important that the Congregation put itself under the word of the Constitutions and Statutes not only in the selection and acceptance of apostolates in the local Church, but also in accordance with the particular way in which such apostolates are to be approached and carried out. The Constitutions and Statutes can be seen as a template to guide choices at all levels in the Community, the polestar of reference in the charting of the Congregation's voyage through time. By frequent reference to our present Constitutions as a criterion of choices that are to be made, the features of the Congregation will be preserved in clear outline. Otherwise those features will become blurred, and the contribution of the Community to the pastoral plan of the local Church will lack tone and colour. It is not that good work will not be done, but the delicate filigree work of the Spirit of God (who is the *digitus dexterae Dei*), for which the Congregation was created, would remain unaccomplished or even impeded. The good at times can be the enemy of the best.
7. St. Vincent was fond of using the metaphor of a ship for the Congregation. There may be many ships on the ocean. We have been placed by Divine Providence in one particular ship. Our vocation is to remain in it and work faithfully as one of its crewmembers. In so doing we will be brought safely to the port of heaven. The Rules or Common Constitutions chart the course — and hence the importance "*of basing your lives firmly on these rules... which in the long term will lead you safely to the goal you long for, happiness in heaven.*"<sup>3</sup>
8. When from time to time I read over the first 50 articles of our Constitutions, I invariably close the book with two reflections uppermost in my mind. Firstly, the wealth of spirituality that has been condensed and encapsulated into these articles which treat of the essential elements of our Vincentian vocation, of our apostolates, and our life in community. It has often been noted that the second chapter of our Common Rules, which St. Vincent entitled *The Evangelical Maxims*, is the resumé of his own vision and ideals for the Congregation and its

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<sup>3</sup> *Common Rules*, Introduction.

apostolates. Something analogously could be said of the first 50 articles of our Constitutions. The unpacking of the content of these articles requires repeated and prayerful reflection if they are to yield up the gold that is in them.

9. Secondly, in reading these articles I am convinced that there is much yet to be mined and unpacked from them. Talking with confreres as well as with members of other Communities and listening to the observations they sometimes make about their revised Constitutions, I have on a number of occasions been left with the impression that, while members can be very familiar with certain articles of purely juridical content, — such as the duration of superiors' offices, the requirements for admission to vows, norms for the administration of property and so forth — the more inspirational articles treating of the vocation, spirit, vows and community life are less often talked about and made the subject of community review and reflection. Invariably it will be agreed that the revised Constitutions of Communities are beautiful expressions of the spirit and ideals of the particular institute. But the question can be asked do these fine formulations enjoy a too peaceful existence within the covers of the volume of revised Constitutions and Statutes? Have our Constitutions and Statutes been fully claimed and owned by our Community? Or do we give them (to use Cardinal Newman's phrase) "*notional rather than real assent*"?
10. Those of us of an older generation in the Congregation will recall how week after week paragraphs of St. Vincent's *Common Rules* were systematically made the subject of community reflection and conference. Certain phrases of St. Vincent's text thus became consecrated, so to speak, and could be cited with facility and applied as norms of action. The unfolding of the riches of some of the paragraphs of the *Common Rules* over the centuries undoubtedly inspired and energized many confreres in their varied missions throughout the world.
11. Among the articles of our present Constitutions there are many very succinct and excellently crafted articles that capture the mission, the spirit, and ideals of the Congregation. Precisely because they are succinct they call for much prayerful reflection if they are to yield up their energizing power. Let me instance three among many fine articles that contain much spiritual pabulum, but which, if they are to release their full power, need to be reflected and prayed on phrase by phrase.

*... The spirit of the Congregation comprises those intimate personal attitudes of Christ which our Founder recommended to the members from the beginning: love and reverence*



towards the Father, compassionate and effective love for the poor, and docility to divine Providence.<sup>4</sup>

Apostolic involvement with the world, community life, and the experience of God in prayer complement one another and make an organic unity in the life of a missionary. For, when we pray, faith, fraternal love, and apostolic zeal are constantly renewed; and in action, the love of God and neighbor is effectively manifested. Through the intimate union of prayer and apostolate a missionary becomes a contemplative in action and an apostle in prayer.<sup>5</sup>

The ideal of evangelical and chaste celibacy is magnificently expressed in Article 29:

*Imitating Christ in his limitless love for all, we embrace by vow perfect chastity in the form of celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. We accept it as a gift given us by the personal and infinite goodness of God.*

*In this way we open our hearts more widely to God and neighbor, and our whole way of acting becomes a joyous expression of the love between Christ and the Church which will be fully manifested in the age to come.*

And for practical means to be adopted to live this ideal it would be difficult to improve on Article 30:

*Intimate union with Christ, true fraternal communion, zeal in the apostolate, and asceticism supported by the experience of the Church, will enable our chastity to grow strong. Through a continual and mature response to the Lord's call, it is a living source of spiritual fecundity in the world; it also contributes greatly to the attainment of human maturity.*

12. The bishops assembled at the first Vatican Council pleaded for a simplification or codification of the large, unwieldy body of ecclesiastical law current at the time. Their cry was, *Obruimur legibus: We are smothered with laws*. When one surveys the numerous documents — and most of them very rich in theological content — that have emanated from authorities at all levels in the Church over the past 35 years, one might feel tempted to exclaim: *Obruimur documentis: We are smothered with documents*. Given the dizzy rapidity of change in the modern world, it would seem to be almost inevitable that it be so. In a world of change frequent adaptations and ongoing

<sup>4</sup> C. 6.

<sup>5</sup> C. 42.

direction by authority of our energies are necessary, if we are to meet the emerging challenges of the apostolate today; hence, the multitude of documents, mission statements, reports. In a sea that today is stormy and choppy we may feel at times like the apostles in the boat — that it is dark and that there is a headwind against us. In such moments Archbishop Romero's reminder is pertinent:

*We are workers. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. We cannot do everything, and there is liberation in realising that. This enables us to do something, and to do it well. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and worker. We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.*

Yes, we are workers. And workers work according to a basic master plan and consult it often. Such a basic plan is our Constitutions and Statutes. It is well that we return often to the master plan. It is well that we put ourselves often under its word.

# The Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission

## Historical Notes

*by Carlo Braga, C.M.*

*Province of Rome*

To understand the present Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission, it is very helpful to be familiar with the journey through history that preceded it. Their origin, in fact, begins with the contract of the de Gondi family with St. Vincent, and the recognition of the Company by ecclesiastical authorities; it carries with it the reality of the gradual formation of juridical norms necessary for its consolidation, and of the codification of the principles and the laws that give it a certain character within the Church. In this process the project and the prudence of St. Vincent come to light, but above all one sees the guiding hand of Providence in the history of the "Little Company."

## I. The Legislative Work of St. Vincent

This extends over a period of almost 35 years: from the contract of foundation with the de Gondi family, until the death of St. Vincent.

### 1. *The Foundation of the Company (1625-1659)*

**1.1. *The Contract of Foundation.*** This is a notarized contract, of a civil nature, with which, through Philip Emmanuel de Gondi, Marguerite de Silly and Vincent de Paul, is set up a plan to found "a pious association of some ecclesiastics," who, under Vincent's guidance, would commit themselves to take care of the evangelization of poor people of the countryside. It wished to make permanent the events of Gannes-Folleville, of 1617. The essential elements of this contract are:

- a) There is an intention to provide some remedy for the spiritual abandonment of the poor people of the countryside by

constituting a "pious association of some ecclesiastics, well-versed in doctrine, piety and capacity, who wish to renounce both the conditions of the above-mentioned cities, as well as every benefice, position, or dignity in the Church, to give themselves, with the assent of the prelates of their dioceses, entirely and solely, to the salvation of the poor people, going from village to village, with expenses paid from their common purse, to preach to, to instruct, to exhort, and to catechize these poor people, and to get everyone ready to make a good general confession of their past life without taking any payment under any form, so that they distribute freely the gifts they have received from the generous hand of God."

- b) The de Gondis are set up as "patrons and founders of this good work." To fulfill this task they commit themselves to give Vincent de Paul the sum of 45,000 pounds to invest in lands and other holdings, whose return on investment would serve to maintain the association and its members.
- c) The members of the association assume the obligation of renouncing expressly every position, benefice, or dignity; to live in common under obedience to M. Vincent and his successor, "under the name of Company, Congregation, or Confraternity of the Fathers or the Priests of the Mission and to give missions in the land holdings of the de Gondis every five years, and to use their free time in the works of assistance and help to pastors."
- d) At the death of Vincent de Paul, superior for life, the members of the association will chose among themselves his successor whose term will be for three years. The de Gondis renounce the right to present the nomination of a successor (SV XIII, 197-202).

The characteristic notes of the Company and of the commitments that it assumes, described in these acts, are to be recalled because they will still be the basis of all the documents that follow.

**1.2. *Recognition by the Archbishop of Paris*** (24 April 1626). The Act of Foundation, signed by the de Gondis and by M. Vincent on 17 April 1625, is "received, praised, and approved" by the Archbishop of Paris, Jean François de Gondi, brother of the founder of the "pious association," on 24 April 1626. It gives ecclesiastical recognition to something founded civilly, whose ministries are the competence of ecclesiastical authorities. It confirms the clauses of the initial contract; it permits the missionaries to establish themselves in Paris, and puts conditions on his consent and their apostolic commitment. It is curious that the Archiepiscopal Decree, while citing the de Gondis with all their titles, does not carry the name of Vincent de Paul, the other party to the agreement, but instead speaks of a contract "regarding other ecclesiastics" (SV XIII, 202-203).

**1.3. *The association of the first three missionaries*** (4 September 1626). Within a year, Vincent was obliged to gather together a community of six ecclesiastics who would live and work with him. With some delay, this cause finds its first partial actuation through a notarized document, an act again of a civil nature, of the association to St. Vincent of the first three missionaries: François de Coudray and Jean de la Salle, priests of the diocese of Amiens, and Antoine Portail, priest of the diocese of Arles. These men committed themselves to "live together as a congregation, company, or confraternity," and to work for the salvation of the poor people of the countryside, according to the stated foundation, with a promise to respect the nature of the foundation and to observe the rules formulated for it, and to obey Vincent and his successors (SV XIII, 203-205).

**1.4. *Approval by the King and the Parliament.*** The King approved the Company in May 1627, confirming all of the clauses of both the contract of foundation and of the approval by the Archbishop of Paris (SV XIII, 206-208). The Parliament ratified the royal decision three years later (4 April 1631: SV XIII, 232-233) after having overcome the opposition of the clergy of Paris, who feared an intrusion, especially of an economic character, by the new company (SV XIII, 227-232). For this reason a number of clauses are set out in a way that favors peace within the Church.

In these four first steps we see affirmed the structural lines of the new foundation: evangelization of the poor of the countryside, ministry dependent on the bishops and the clergy to be done without charge, to be done with the sustenance of a rule and a common life under the direction of a superior.

## **2. *Pontifical Approbation (1627-1633)***

With the association of his first companions, Vincent had just about brought to life his and the de Gondi's plan. The Archbishop of Paris and the King had approved the "pious association of ecclesiastics." It was an association of the diocese of Paris. With the spread of this missionary work, Vincent also saw the need to gain a recognition that gave his association a right to exist outside of Parisian territory. He had to go to Rome.

We are aware of three moments of this approval that happened in 1627, 1628, and 1632: the first and the third were in favor, while the second was against.

**2.1. *Approval of a "Mission."*** In 1627, Vincent approached the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. Aware of Rome's resistance to the creation of new religious institutes, Vincent does not speak of a "Congregation," but of a "Mission," a technical term then

used for a group of missionaries committed to an apostolic activity, even in Catholic countries, constituted sometimes by members of a religious congregation, but for the most part in a temporary fashion, who were dependent on the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith for their apostolic activity. The Congregation of Cardinals examined his request on 5 November 1627, with the Holy Father present. The work was defined as a "divine inspiration" (a judgment that Urban VIII will repeat in the bull of approbation). So, the request was approved, with the condition that for the exercise of their ministry the missionaries have the prior assent of the bishops. Otherwise, the "Mission" had to have a protector, nominated by the Archbishop of Paris (SV XIII, 238).

The recognition by the Propagation of the Faith made of the new foundation an institute not just of simple diocesan right, but of pontifical right, and thus could extend itself beyond the confines of the diocese of origin. The decision of the Pope and the Cardinals is clear: they are not thinking of a stable religious congregation, but of a "Mission," a temporary entity, according to the technical significance of that time. Rome approved a "Mission," but not yet the "Congregation of the Mission."

[The documentation concerning this approbation was not known by Coste: A. COPPO, "Documenti inediti per la storia della C.M. presso l'archivio della S.C. 'De Propaganda Fide.' I. La prima approvazione pontificia della Missione nel 1627," in *Annali della Missione* 79 (1972), 222-255].

**2.2. The unsuccessful efforts of 1628.** The members of the "mission" progressively became more convinced that their work was of God and was destined for the service of the universal Church. Thus, one year after their first recognition, M. Vincent worked up the courage and sent Propagation of the Faith a new request for approbation, not of a "Mission," but this time of a real "Congregation": the first time in June, and a second time (the same text, but more precise in the formulation of the apostolic character and of the relationship with the bishops) on 1 August 1628 (SV I, 42-51; 52-57). In neither of the two versions does he make reference to the approbation as a 'Mission' obtained the preceding year. Vincent requested the approbation and the confirmation of the institute as a Congregation, with all the privileges in use by other religious institutes, including exemption from the bishops.

The response is negative (SV XIII, 225). Propagation of the Faith well understood the thought of Vincent and thus kept in mind two things: the hostility of the Curia to the creation of new religious congregations and the limits of the approbation given in the preceding year, from which it did not believe it should stray too far. All that notwithstanding, Propagation of the Faith conceded that "there be established... the Mission of the aforementioned priests

with ample faculties for the whole kingdom of France with the permission of the Ordinaries... they can increase up to 20 or 25 the number of priests without giving to the mission the form of a Congregation or of a Confraternity ... the Apostolic See does not judge favorably the institution of either religions or confraternities of Congregations of Missions, because besides the fact that the nature of these Missions is contrary to these links, the perpetuity of the Congregations, Religions, and Confraternities is also contrary to the Missions themselves, which are instituted for needs which cease with the conversion of the peoples to whom these Missions are directed" (SV XIII, 224).

[For some documentation concerning this petition, its presentation and the request for intervention by the Nuncio, other than those things published by Coste (SV XIII, 218-222), see: A. COPPO, "Documenti inediti per la storia della Congregazione della Missione, presso l'archivio della S.C. 'De Propaganda Fide.' II. Le due suppliche del 1628 per l'erezione dell'Istituto in Congregazione di diritto pontificio, non accolte dalla sacra Congregazione," in *Annali della Missione* 80 (1973), 37-65].

**2.3. The request of 1632.** The negative response of the Propagation of the Faith did not discourage M. Vincent who, in 1631, sent Fr. Du Coudray to Rome to help move along and follow from nearby new attempts for the approval of the Congregation. He was also convinced of the need to change the group to whom he addressed his request. In fact, at the beginning of 1632 he sent a new request to the Pope. This time he did not go through the Propagation of the Faith, but through the Congregation for Bishops and for Regulars.

In the first part of the document, Vincent makes a brief historical presentation of the foundation and of the fruits of the apostolic labor done by it. In the second part, he asks the approval of a "Congregation of secular priests called missionaries," "with the conditions, rules and orders that are contained in the attached writing" and with all the concessions usually given in similar circumstances. In particular, Vincent asked that the missionaries could work, with the mandate of the Ordinaries and the permission of pastors: to give missions, to teach catechism, to instruct the poor people of the countryside, to begin the company of charity, to settle disputes and discords, to form clergy in the knowledge of moral theology and the celebration of the sacraments, to welcome priests into their houses for retreats, to prepare the ordinands. All this was to be done free of charge. On the juridical level, he asked that the Congregation be composed of clerics, to be admitted at the age of 17 or 18 after a year's trial, of "secular priests" and of laymen; that Vincent be recognized as superior of the house of Paris and others to be founded and of all the Congregation for life; that after his death the successors be elected for three years, with the possibility of a



second successive term; that the superior general have the faculties that other superiors general have, and that he be able to legislate for the Congregation with the consent of the Ordinary; and, finally, that the Congregation enjoy the privileges, faculties, and immunities that other congregations enjoy.

The request arrived at the Plenary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on 30 April 1632. The relater was Cardinal Bentivoglio who had already proposed acceptance of the request of 1627, and the rejection of the petition of 1628. There was no opposition but only the request for more information to get from the nuncio in France and from the Archbishop of Paris. These two responded in the affirmative. We do not have an official immediate response, and we are not aware of documents that let us know of the further fate of the request. Certainly the work of Fr. Du Coudry had added much weight to it.

[The documentation of this new petition was unknown to Coste. The request of M. Vincent was discovered in the Vatican Archives in 1925: G. MAZZINI, "Per l'approvazione della Congregazione della Missione. Un documento dell'anno 1632," in *Annali della Missione* 32 (1925), 174-187].

**2.4. The Bull "Salvatoris nostri" of Urban VIII (12 January 1633).** The response to the petition of 1632 was given on 12 January 1633 with the Bull of approbation of the Congregation, the Bull "Salvatoris nostri" of Urban VIII (SV XIII, 257-267). The "Pius Association" founded on 17 April 1625, the "Mission" of 1627 finally became the "Congregation of Mission." Signed by the Pope, the Bull was sent to the Promoter of the Curia of Paris on 30 October 1633. The Archbishop is named its executor. The publication in view of its execution came on 14 March 1634 and was executed on the following 27 November. Only on 16 March 1642 did the King grant his approval (SV XIII, 286-287).

It is useful to recall the essential points of the Papal Document and to compare it with the clauses of the initial contract with de Gondi:

- a) "The principal end and the specific scope of this Congregation and of its members will be, with the help of Divine Grace, to dedicate themselves, together with their own salvation, to the salvation of those who live in rustic homes, in villages, in the countryside, in the localities and areas that are the poorest; in the inhabited towns instead, and in the cities ... their task will be to welcome for spiritual exercises the candidates for holy orders ... and to prepare them adequately to receive the same holy orders." In the missions they shall, with the prior permission of the pastor: teach the commandments and the first elements of Christian Doctrine; accept general confessions; administer the



Eucharist; teach catechism and other familiar instructions "*ad captum populi*;" found the confraternity of charity; resolve disputes and discords. They can take care of the formation of pastors through retreats in their houses or in monthly local reunions.

All the ministries are to be done free of charge.

- b) "The members of this Congregation, even though subject for discipline and direction to the superior general and their own superiors, are also subject to the Ordinaries of the places only for what concerns the missions, in such a way that the same Ordinaries can send to those parts of their dioceses, as they see fit, the members designated by superiors."
- c) The members of the Congregation can be laymen, clerics, or priests; the clerics, can be received at the age of at least 17 or 18, and after a year of formation, if they have the intention to remain in the Congregation for their whole life. Their duties: venerate in a special way the Most Holy Trinity, the sacred mystery of the Incarnation, the Blessed Virgin Mary, mother of God. Celebrate or participate daily at Mass, weekly at confession and communion, an hour of meditation every day and examination of conscience.
- d) Vincent will be superior general for life. After his death a new superior general will be elected. He will have power over all the houses of the Congregation, he will nominate superiors and various other officials, and he will have the faculties that superiors general of other congregations have.

During his term, he may establish, change, or abolish the norms that he believes to be useful for the good of the Congregation; these are to be approved by the Archbishop of Paris.

- e) The Congregation, the fruit of Divine Inspiration, is pleasing to God, useful to men, and necessary. Its spread is thus hoped for and to be encouraged.
- f) The approbation properly expressed follows: the Archbishop of Paris is given the task of approving the Congregation of the Mission, its rules, and its superior.

"*Ad cautelam*" are listed some of the more important points: the name of the Congregation, the members, the superior general at its foundation and how his successors will be chosen, the exemption from jurisdiction by the bishops except for what concerns the missions, the power to own and acquire, and the communication of the privileges that other congregations enjoy. The rules and other dispositions are to be approved by the Archbishop of Paris.

The final clauses of universal and perpetual validity follow.

The Bull of Urban VIII signals the logical and decisive watershed in the natural and legislative growth of the Congregation; it

reconfirms the fundamental clauses of the contract of foundation, the requests contained in the application for approbation of 1632, and some elements of the demand of 1628. All this shows that Vincent had clear ideas about how to organize his Congregation.

### 3. *Creation of the internal juridical order (1642-1655)*

Once the definitive approval of the Congregation was achieved, the work of concretizing the principles contained in the papal document began for Vincent: the internal life, apostolic work, and the spiritual life of the Institute. The Papal Bull gave this work to Vincent alone with two limitations: not to go against the dispositions of Trent, and to get the approval of his decisions from the Archbishop of Paris. Vincent will make the most of this faculty. But from 1642 he begins to think of the Assemblies as the structures by which to avail himself of the collaboration of other confreres.

**3.1. *The first Assembly of the Community*** was held at St. Lazare from 13 to 23 October 1642. Besides Vincent it was composed of ten missionaries, five superiors of the houses closest to Paris and five called to take the place of the superiors farther away. Vincent saw the Assembly as an element that would complete the organization of the company. He explained its value and purpose. He presided over and directed its labors. The minutes of the sessions inform us of the matters that were treated (SV XIII, 287-293):

- a) The rules of the Congregation: These were discussed 14-16 October. Because many observations and proposals were made, to save time a commission was named that, together with the superior general, would work at fixing a text.
- b) The rules of the Superior General: election, disciplinary and administrative powers, the possibility of his resigning, suggestions on how to nominate a successor.
- c) The division of the houses in provinces: the principle was accepted and at the end of the Assembly four provinces were established.
- d) The system for the election of the Superior General: the vicar designated by him succeeds a general who died and there will be presented to the Assembly, without any binding force, the two names suggested by the deceased general as his possible successors to guide the Company.
- e) Triennial Assemblies: these will be held both in the provinces and at the general level.
- f) The seminary of renewal: to be done six or seven years after one's internal seminary (a decision never carried out by the Congregation).

- g) Two Assistants will be elected, "the guardian angels" of the Superior General.

The written conclusions of the Assembly are the first page of the fundamental law of the Congregation which begins to be concretized in a precise and secure body of rules. It will be completed in the Assembly of 1651.

**3.2. *The second Assembly of the Community*** was held at Saint Lazare from 1 July to 23 August 1651. It is an important step forward in the formulation of the constitutional law of the Company. Under the presidency of M. Vincent there are 13 missionaries in attendance, of whom nine are superiors. We have a brief summary of it (SV XIII, 326-332) and a rather ample report with personal judgments, edited privately by Fr. Lucas (SV XIII, 333-356). The theme that takes the most of the Assembly's attention is that of the vows. But the problem of the Rules returns again. Here are the points treated:

- a) The vows of the Company: to be maintained or abolished? Do we abolish the clause about their dispensability reserved to the Pope and to the Superior General? The opinions are very diverse; at the end their conservation is accepted, warmly sustained by Vincent, requesting, however, from Rome a confirmation of the approbation given by the Archbishop of Paris.
- b) Doubts about the wisdom of the Superior General's indicating two names to the Assembly for the nomination of his successor. But the rules remain in place.
- c) Secondary problems concerning the life of the Company (missions, coadjutor brothers, absences, etc.).
- d) Revision of the Common Rules of the Community. The final editing is then left to a restricted commission. At the end of its work the participants sign a request for approbation of the Rules directed to the Archbishop of Paris, delegated by the Pope for this purpose. They lay out the journey of the Rules' presentation and it is said that these Rules were "practiced by us for over 25 years before they were written down" (SV XIII, 357-359).

The Archbishop approved the body of the Rules and Constitutions on 23 August 1653 (cf. *Vincentiana* 33 [1991] 404-406, and SV XIII, 365-366). The text seems to be that contained in the so-called "Codex Sarzana" registered in the library of the House of the Mission of Sarzana (Province of Turin) and presently in the archives of General Curia in Rome.

**3.3. *The first "Codex" of legislation for the Congregation*** (Codex Sarzana), the oldest written text which gathers all the Rules fixed by the Assemblies of 1642 and 1651, approved by the Archbishop of Paris on 23 August 1653 contains:

- a) The common Rules;
- b) The *Ordinatio* and the formula of the vows; a declaration on the vow of poverty, the archiepiscopal approval of the vows, of 1641;
- c) The rules of the Superior General;
- d) The rules of the Visitor;
- e) The rules of the local Superior;
- f) Norms for the Assemblies (general for the election of the General, ordinary, and provincial);
- g) Approbation of the Archbishop of Paris, of 1653;
- h) Notarized authentication of the documents and the authentication of the Nuncio.

This text is at the basis of the Rules of 1658 which will contain changes that will also be significant in the formation of many articles and above all for what regards the discipline of poverty.

[A. COPPO, "La prima stesura delle regole e costituzioni della Congregazione della Missione," in *Annali della Missione* 64 (1957), 206-254; IDEM, "Antiquissimus codex regularum et constitutionum Congregationis anno 1655 manu scriptus archivo generali dono datus," in *Vincentiana* 16 (1972), 115-124. For the entire text see: "Codex Sarzana," transcribed and edited by J. Rybolt, in *Vincentiana* 33 (1991), 303-406].

#### 4. *The Vows (1641-1659)*

One of the problems which weighed heavily upon the life of the new Congregation was the perseverance of its members. The work was hard and certainly not always gratifying; consequently, after some time, some left or felt the temptation to do so. They were not bonded with the Community except by the promise of observing the Rules. According to Vincent, the problem could be solved with a stronger bond, like that of the vows. But he had difficulties to overcome: the Congregation could become just one of the many religious congregations; the parish priests, in this case, would not continue to have the same trust or confidence; those who were already in the community had entered it with other perspectives, etc. Vincent discussed the matter at length with the confreres, consulted experts, made various projects concerning the number and the nature of the vows in his Congregation, prayed and, finally, asked the necessary approval.

**4.1. *The Approbation of the Archbishop of Paris*** (19 October 1641). It was the first step: the Archbishop of Paris was commissioned by the Bull of Urban VIII to approve the norms of the Congregation. The decree establishes: the vows, which have the purpose of assuring

perseverance in the vocation; they will be made after the second year of the internal seminary; they are simple and can be dispensed only by the Pope or by the Superior General; the members already admitted to the Congregation are free to make them; the Congregation continues to belong to the clergy (*in the document the word "secular" is missing*) (SV XIII, 283-286). The decree forms part of the legislation contained in the Codex Sarzana. Its terms are found in the pontifical approbation.

**4.2. Pontifical Approbation** (22 September 1655). The approbation of the Archbishop of Paris, even though done with pontifical authority, did not create an atmosphere of common and serene acceptance of the vows in the Community of the Mission. A lively opposition was evident in the Assembly of 1651. The latter accepted the position of the founder, but asked that a recourse be made to Rome in order to have a definitive solution to the problem. To this purpose, Vincent saw to it that some doctors of the Sorbonne prepare an extensive and deep study, which he then had presented to the Congregation of Bishops and of Regulars (SV XIII, 365-370).

The result was the Brief "Ex commissa nobis," of Alexander VII (22 September 1655), which approved the vows made in the Congregation of the Mission (SV XIII, 380-382), confirming the notes and conditions approved by the Archbishop of Paris in 1641 and 1653:

- a) The confirmation of the Congregation as approved by Urban VIII.
- b) The simple vows of chastity, poverty and obedience and that of stability were recognized with the end of dedicating oneself to the evangelization of the poor people of the countryside throughout one's lifetime.
- c) The vows will be made at the end of the second year of formation in the seminary (that the second year of the seminary should precede the making of the vows will be specified by Alexander VII on 7 October 1662), without anyone receiving them neither in the name of the Congregation nor in that of the Pope.
- d) The vows can be dispensed only by the Pope and by the Superior General *in actu dimissionis* (this limitation will be confirmed by Clement X on 23 June 1670).
- e) Notwithstanding such vows, the members of the Congregation remain members of the secular clergy and exempt from the Ordinaries, except with respect to the missions.

After receiving the Brief, Vincent convoked his confreres of St. Lazare, presented the document to them and had a notarized certificate of acceptance of the will of the Pope on the part of the

Congregation drawn up, having it signed by the confreres of the house (SV XIII, 383-385).

**4.3. The "Fundamental Statute" of Poverty** (12 August 1659). After accepting the decision of Alexander VII on the vows in the Company, there remained some problems with regard to poverty. The sphere of the vow was regulated in the Assembly of 1651 (SV XIII, 351). And what was decided in that Assembly thus passed into the Rules approved in 1653. The vow turned out very severe, requiring the turning over of the fruits of benefices possessed in favor of the Congregation. Vincent, in 1659, asked and obtained another intervention from Alexander VII with the Brief "Alias nos" (12 August 1659), which defines the terms of the vow of poverty to be observed in the Congregation. It is the "fundamental statute" which, in modifying the preceding "conditions," provides:

- a) The right of the members of the Congregation to keep their immovable goods and simple benefices.
- b) The use of their own goods limited by dependence on the superior.
- c) The fruits of such goods could not be spent for one's own use without permission of the superior; but, always with the permission of the superior, must be employed in good works. The first ones to be helped are parents and other needy relatives (SV XIII, 406-409).

[For the changes which followed in the norms concerning poverty: A. COPPO, "L'evolution du vœu du pauvre des prêtres de la Mission jusqu'en 1659," in *Vincentiana* 16 (1972), 256-272].

## II. The Work of the General Assemblies (1668-1963)

### 1. *The General Assemblies after the death of St. Vincent (1661 and 1668)*

**1.1. The General Assembly of 1661** (15-20 January) elected René Almérás as the first successor of Vincent, according to the norms established in 1642. It was the first proper and true General Assembly and was called to ratify whatever was experimented under the direction of the Founder and to complete its own organization.

**1.2. The "Constitutiones maiores."** Eight years later, the second General Assembly (15 July to 1 September 1668) again examined the Constitutions and worked at an attentive and meticulous revision of them (cf. *Collectio completa decretorum conventuum generalium C.M.*,

Paris 1892, pp. 27-39). The text was approved by the Archbishop of Paris, Arduino de Péréfix on 24 October 1668.

The whole group of documents form the so-called "Constitutiones maiores" or "Constitutiones quae Superiorem Generalem totiusque Congregationis gubernationem spectant," and will guide the life of the Company until 1954, when their contents were absorbed by the Constitutions approved by Pius XII. Here is the list of the chapters:

- a) De qualitate, potestate ac officio Superioris Generalis;
- b) De cura, auctoritate et potestate Congregationis erga Superiorem Generalem;
- c) De Superioris Generalis schedis ad nominationem Vicarii Generalis et electionem Superioris Generalis spectantibus;
- d) De officio Vicarii Generalis in convocatione Conventus Generalis ad electionem Superioris Generalis in locum demortui et in gubernatione universae Congregationis;
- e) De Conventibus Provincialibus, mittendi causa ad Conventum Generalem pro eligendo Superiore Generali;
- f) De agendis in Conventu Generali ante diem electionis Superioris Generalis;
- g) De iis quae ipso die electionis sunt observanda;
- h) De iis quae post electionem fieri debent;
- i) De electione Assistentium et Admonitoris Superioris Generalis;
- j) De Conventu Provinciali cogendo ad negotia tractanda;
- k) De Conventu Deputatorum ad deliberandum de cogendo vel non cogendo Conventu Generali;
- l) De Conventu Generali cogendo ad tractanda negotia.

The text, important for the entire life of the Congregation, was always covered by great secrecy. In 1668, the Assembly established that it should be reserved to the Visitor. In the 1847 edition the Visitor was allowed to make it known to superiors and some prudent confreres, but with the prohibition, *sub poena inobedientiae*, to copy the text.

**1.3. The "Constitutiones selectae."** At the end of the work of revising the Constitutions left by St. Vincent, the 1668 Assembly decided to select the most important parts and to have them approved by the Holy See, in order to give more stability to the particular law of the Congregation. It was feared that the broad authority of the Superior General, "in suo officio perpetuus," could lead even to substantial changes in the particular law.



[Clement X approved them with the Brief "Ex iniuncto nobis," of 2 June 1670 (cf. *Acta Apostolica... in gratiam Congregationis Missionis*, Paris 1876, pp. 33-38)].

The papal document, consisting of 20 articles, defines the functions and limits of power of the Superior General, stating that he is "in officio perpetuus"; specifies his relationship with the General Assembly and the entire Congregation, the powers regarding the provinces and the houses and concerning the goods of the Congregation. Notwithstanding the declared superiority of the Assembly over the Superior General, the latter can condition its work, because it is foreseen that the Assembly can only treat that which the Superior General or the "Commissio magna," composed of two Assistants and four members of the Assembly, may admit for this purpose (n. 15). This Commission will be abolished in 1963.

With the General Assembly of 1668 and the approval of the "Constitutiones Selectae," the Congregation has a complete body of consitutional laws which specifies and defines the outline of the Bull of Urban VIII:

1. On the spiritual level, inspiring and, in part, legal, it has the "Regulae seu Constitutiones communes," which contain the thought and the spiritual and apostolic anxiety of St. Vincent. They are his spiritual testament, the fruit of his preoccupation for more than 30 years, the program of perfection in the light of Christ, the evangelizer.
2. On the strictly legal level, it possesses:
  - a) The "Constitutiones selectae," which contain the most important legal norms, which are like the skeleton of the body of the Company: its constitution and its government. They have the approval of the Holy See and assure, as desired by the 1668 Assembly, the stability of the structure, sheltered from changes that a General Assembly or a Superior General could carry out.
  - b) The "Constitutiones maiores," laid down by the 1668 Assembly, concluded a long road begun by St. Vincent in 1642. They have the approbation of the Assembly and the confirmation of the Archbishop of Paris in his capacity as papal delegate for the approbation of the Congregation's laws.
  - c) More specific documents which regulate the discipline of the vows and, in particular, that of poverty, come from the papal interventions of Alexander VII (1655 and 1659).

In the whole of this legal corpus, the Congregation has many norms (like all other institutes of consecrated life), and also a code of spiritual life which guides its way. The Congregation has always founded its life and its service to the Church and to the poor on these



spiritual and juridical norms. The usual interventions of successive General Assemblies and those of Superiors General also support it. This security may have contributed also to creating a certain institutionalization and to confusing the authentic "primitive spirit" with the sclerosis of the norms and life.

## 2. *The Assembly General of 1947*

This security should have been put to discussion by the publication of the Code of Canon Law in 1917. The Community found itself before the need of questioning itself concerning some points, including fundamental ones, about its structure and its life and of defining itself in new juridical terms, as outlined by the new Code. For example: how should the nature of its "secularity," the nature of its simple vows, private but privileged, some structures of its organization be interpreted? Does its "secularity" place it securely from being incorporated among the real religious institutes? Or does it allow it to be placed among the societies without vows?

A series of postponements in taking into consideration the new problems, notwithstanding the repeated pressures from the Holy See, make one think that a true political will and a broad and united mind that gets to work with determination was lacking. The war contributed to blocking the timid attempts which had begun. It was only at the beginning of 1947 that Fr. Edward Robert, on convoking a General Assembly for the summer of that year, announced that it would examine an outline of new Constitutions prepared by Fr. Guido Cocchi. It is a project which seeks to preserve the traditional law of the Congregation and to find a place for it in the new ecclesiastical law of the Code. The General Assembly approved it. Confrontations and revisions between the Holy See and the General Council followed (the Curia had received from the Holy See a package of 130-140 observations) and finally, on 19 July 1953, Pius XII signed the Brief "*Evangelium ad pauperes*" for the approbation of the new Constitutions. Fr. Slattery promulgated them on 25 January 1954.

## 3. *The Constitutions of Pius XII (1954)*

It is the first time that the Congregation has a unitary and organic text of its particular law (*Constitutiones ac Regulae Congregationis Missionis, Parisiis, In domo primaria C.M., 1954*). The text is presented in a very juridical form and spirit and in it a schema of "religious life" prevails in which the Congregation is seen compelled by the mentality of the Roman organisms, which tend toward an often unwarranted standardization.

- a) The presentation of the end is to be noted. Even though preserving the terms of the Common Rules, the new Constitutions distinguish between a "general end" (to work at personal perfection) and a "specific end"; that is, the evangelization of the poor, the formation of the clergy and they add as a new element, "to give itself to works of charity and education."
- b) The nature of the Congregation is that of a "society of clerics, exempt, of which the members, though not being religious properly so-called, imitate however the way of life of religious, living in common under the government of superiors according to their own Constitutions, with vows which are not public, but privileged."
- c) On the more structural level, the new Constitutions introduce from the Code the triennial temporary vows before the perpetual profession. The vows of the Congregation, it is said, "even though not being public, they are, however, privileged and perpetual." Their dispensation remains reserved to the Pope and to the Superior General *in actu dimissionis*, but after the cleric in sacred orders has found a bishop who is willing to receive him.
- d) As far as government is concerned, the limits of the authority of the Superior General and the Visitors in relation to their respective councils are better defined, indicating when the intervention of the councils are only consultative or decisive. The interval for the General Assemblies is fixed at eight years. The number of the Assistants General and their terms of office are established; the term of office of governing is indicated, etc. Moreover, some dispositions of the Common Rules are put into the Constitutions as well.

It is difficult to say what would have been the impact of the new Constitutions in the life of the Congregation. The period that they remained in force (1954-1968) was too short: changes can be made quickly on the disciplinary level, but the profound effects of the changes themselves are perceived on a much longer term.

#### 4. The General Assembly of 1963

The Assemblies of 1955 (the last in Paris) and 1963 (the first in Rome) took place with the Constitutions of 1954. Their style was that of the preceding Assemblies. They did not treat of an organic theme which would indicate the long term planning lines for the Congregation. They treated postulates presented by the provinces or by individual confreres. The subjects of some importance were the transfer of the Curia to Rome, the term of office of the Superior General, the competencies of the "magna commissio" which had the duty to examine the postulates, as well as the power of preventing them from reaching the conference room if it judged them contrary

to the Constitutions, etc. The most important conclusion was the decree by which the Superior General was given the mandate to plan for an extraordinary Assembly for the complete "aggiornamento" of the Congregation, as soon as the Council concluded. It was the small seed destined to become the great tree of renewal of the Congregation.

### III. The Postconciliar Renewal (1967-1984)

The postconciliar period, during which the Congregation worked at its juridical, spiritual and apostolic renewal, was a time of grace because of the sensitivity which it produced in the whole Company and because of the degree of interest which this, at the different levels of its organization, brought to preparing and to accompanying the works of the Assemblies which were held. A proof of this was the *Schema Constitutionum et Statutorum C.M.* (1968) which, however, was immediately rejected by the Assembly. The history of these Assemblies is known. It can be read in the issues of *Vincentiana* or in the provincial magazines. It is not necessary to rewrite it.

I recall rather quickly: the extraordinary Assembly of 1968-1969 provided a first redaction of the text of the new Constitutions. The work was marked by the difficulties coming from the opposing positions of the participants, above all as regards the definition of the end, with the implications deriving from it ("*Constitutiones et Statuta Congregationis Missionis*," in *Vincentiana* 13 [1969], 85-126).

The Assembly of 1974 was interlocutory. It did not revise the text of the preceding Assembly, but drew up some Declarations which proposed to meditate again on the way of St. Vincent in order to focus attention on it once more ("*Conventus Generalis XXXV, Declarationis*," in *Vincentiana* 18 [1974], 286-302).

The Assembly of 1980, at which a great number of delegates were new, performed the job of re-writing the whole text of the Constitutions, with a more open spirit ("*Constitutiones et Statuta Congregationis Missionis*," in *Vincentiana* 24 [1980], 193-268). The new Constitutions, presented to the examination of the Holy See, were approved on 29 June 1984, published the following 27 September and came into force on 25 January 1985 (*Constitutiones Congregationis Missionis — Statuta Congregationis Missionis*, Curia Generalis C.M., Romae, 1984).

What overall judgment can we give to the present Constitutions?

- a) They preserve faithfully the elements of the authentic tradition of the Company. They were born from the collaboration of the whole Congregation. The work lasted for 12 years. It is not, therefore, a text which comes from the thought of a small group

of persons who worked on a table, but which originates from the reflection and the suggestions and desires of the whole Company.

- b) They offer a balanced and clear text. Tensions were not lacking in its elaboration, but in the end it expresses a real consensus of all. It is a text of full harmony, which preserves unity in the essential and necessary things, and assures pluralism coming from diverse cultures and situations.
- c) They present a juridically precise text on the points which define the Congregation: end, nature of the Company, vows which do not make us religious, community life which is not an end in itself but which is inspired and oriented by the work in common, insertion in the local Church. Above all, the definition of the Congregation is clear: a Society of Apostolic Life, a definition which ought to inspire all the juridical, apostolic and spiritual organization of the Company.
- d) They are rich in doctrinal ideas derived from the gospel, the Church's magisterium and the doctrine of St. Vincent, especially the Common Rules. The study of the Constitutions ought to emphasize above all the renewal of Vincentian spirituality.
- e) They propose a simple text, coherent in its compilation, free of useless affected expressions. The drafting in a vernacular language would certainly have given it greater immediacy and spontaneity: the Latin, which is less familiar, limits the form and the inspiration.
- f) They are a document which needs to be studied in depth and prayed. Fr. McCullen highlighted this: "much reflective reading and prayer of our Constitutions is called for" (Promulgation Letter). The commentaries should study the sources, the bonds with tradition, the spirituality, etc. This gives dynamic force even to law: "It is impossible to acquire the spirit of the Mission without observing the rules, wherein that spirit is contained and embedded" (SV XI, 80).

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(ROBERT STONE, C.M., and ROLANDO DELAGOZA, C.M., translators)

# Identity of the Congregation According to Articles 1-9 of the Constitutions of 1980

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Province of Peru

## Introduction

"The Constitutions, in as much as they are an expression of our identity, starting from and keeping in mind numbers 1 to 9" (Vocation), are the object of this article.<sup>1</sup> The focus will be *historical and analytical*, centered in Articles 1 to 9. Some information about the history of the text, in particular its origin, will help to analyze and to understand better the content and scope. The Constitutions of an institution are many things at the same time. They are its "Magna Carta," its backbone, the center of its substance, its basic legal body, its Rule of Life, its way to perfection, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Regarding the Constitutions of 1980, there are in *Vincentiana*, between 1980 and 1985, the following articles and studies: E. ANTONELLO, "36th General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission," XXIV, 1980/6, 334-354; C. BRAGA, "The New Constitutions of the C.M.," XXV, 1981/1-2, 63-82; J.O. BAYLACH, "Commenting on the New Constitutions" XXV, 1981/ 3, 222-227 and 5/6, 383-409; J.M. Cavanna, "St. Vincent's Signature in the Revised Constitutions of 1980," XXVI, 1982/3-4, 135-146; MIGUEL PÉREZ FLORES, "Comment on the Constitutions," *ibidem*, 147-187; J.O. BAYLACH, "The Constitutions and Statutes of 1984," XXIX, 1985/1, 83; MIGUEL PÉREZ FLORES, "From the Constitutions of 1980 to those of 1984," *ibidem*, 84-146. There are many other references, not to the whole group but only to some concrete topics of the Constitutions. With regard to them, they refer to the Meeting of Visitors that took place in Bogotá (1983), the Vincentian Month in Paris (1984) and the GA 1986, 1992 and 1998, especially that of 1986. Although, in honor of the 20 years that are celebrated, I refer always to the Constitutions of 1980, in fact I keep in mind the ones of 1984, promulgated and presented by the Superior General with date of 27 September 1984, and that includes the changes that had to be made so that the SCRIS approved (29 July 1984) the Constitutions 1980. Cf., Study cited by MIGUEL PÉREZ FLORES, "From the Constitutions of 1980 to those of 1984."

At this time in history, they interest us as an expression of the identity of the Congregation. Our Constitutions show the makeup and reason for being of the Institution by the way they preserve, encourage, express, and communicate our identity (inner) and our identification (outer). Leaving aside what is peripheral, our interest lies in distinguishing in the Constitutions what is the *essential element* or its *integral element*.<sup>2</sup>

With regards to its identity/identification, it seemed that the Congregation suffered from ambiguity right from the start.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, precisely from its origins, which could seem like its weakness, there is in the community a great innovative force that comes from its founder's charism. The Congregation appears in the Church and in the world like a great innovation (one might even say a revolution). Without a doubt, this gift of the Spirit and the awareness of its special conscience lead it to a permanent and, at times, anxious search for its identity/identification, which is how to locate itself among the poor today. It knows, although it seems sometimes to have forgotten, that its identity is dynamic, not static; organic and alive, not inert.

This identity/identification that the Congregation looks for and has its origin fundamentally in is what we call its End, Nature and Spirit (Vocation in the Constitutions of 1980). There are times when certain elements (works) are presented with conviction for a prolonged period of time, such as the work of the missions or of the clergy, but they do not constitute its fundamental nature/end.<sup>4</sup>

The end, nature and spirit are the essential constituents of the identity of the Congregation.<sup>5</sup> Of the three, the end was the most difficult to clarify and to accept as an identifying factor in the Assemblies of 1968-1969, 1974 and 1980. It was also the one that

<sup>2</sup> To keep in mind and be consistent with this distinction is fundamental. To ignore it or to pass over it has been and continues to be the cause of many wrongs. It has been at the level of Church, when she confused its essential element (Jesus Christ as Good News) and its integral element (the option for the poor, the Social Doctrine, etc.). It has been also at the level of the Congregation, when she confused its End with the institutional means or ways to reach that end, such as missions or work with the clergy.

<sup>3</sup> Without falling into the gossip of a certain black legend, it is certain that our peculiar or atypical personality from the beginnings causes — and can cause in us — certain confusion, exaggerated during the course of time. You have, among others, the following causes: our many names, our many ends, being neither religious nor lay, the nature of our vows.

<sup>4</sup> COSTE XII, 1-14; 73-94; XI, 133, 135-136. Cf., JAIME CORERA, "El Testamento del Señor Vicente" (*Vincentiana* XXIV, 1980/1-2, 42).

<sup>5</sup> The rest of the Constitutions — Articles 10-155 — are also important for our identity and identification, but only when they do not prevent us from seeing the main idea and proceed from and lead us to the main idea.

occupied most time in debate.<sup>6</sup> It is for this reason that to ask what the Constitutions of 1980 express about our identity is to ask what is its end.

The postconciliar search for our identity/identification began with the Superior General, Fr. William M. Slattery, when he convoked the Extraordinary General Assembly of 1968.<sup>7</sup> He convoked it for the *aggiornamento* of the Congregation, but it quickly diverted into the question of a search and definition of our identity starting with the end of the Congregation. It is curious to observe how something that was born from the necessity of *aggiornamento* or renovation is debated among us, from the beginning until the end, in search of the definition of our identity. Could it have been because we were forced to go back the sources?

## The Adventure of a Search

With regard to the Constitutions of 1953, what the Constitutions and Statutes of 1968-1969 say about the end of the C.M. is a good change, but it is not the spectacular jump that had been expected after 16 years of change in the world and in the Church. Yes, there is a positive change in the sensibility and mentality, but surprisingly there is setback in its vision and the formulation of the end,<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Cf., N. 2 of the Chronicles of the Assembly of 1980 which dedicates 13 pages to the history of the End according to the Assemblies of 1968-1969, 1974 and 1980 (beginning), under the title: "Life and miracles of the holy End of the C.M. and some of the temptations and obstacles that it must suffer before arriving at its canonization and holiness."

<sup>7</sup> It was done in following through on an Ordinance of GA/CM 1963 and of the *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae* (II, 3, 6; PC 2, 3, 4). In the summer of 1967, 21 specialized commissions, more than 100 missionaries, prepared this Assembly that was held in Rome from 22 August 1967 to 10 May 1968. Its *Documentum Laboris*, the sadly famous document called the Black Book (for its cover) was simply pushed aside. It seemed that the spirit of the Cultural Youth Revolution of May 1968, entered in the Assembly with its cry of "imagination to power." All was made new.... In spite of this revolutionary spirit and the prevailing liberal pastoral tendencies, the C&S promulgated on 14 September 1969, still without differentiating completely between Constitution and Statute, were very juridical. They were rather far from the Constitutions that had been given by the Church (LG and GS) and from those of the Daughters of Charity.

<sup>8</sup> In 1953 they had the courage to "touch" the end proposed by St. Vincent in the Common Rules (Article 1.1), which was not possible in the GA 1968-1969 (and with great difficulty in that of 1980). They put forth a general end and another special end, to which was added a third point: "To labor in works of charity and education."



especially considering the famous note of Article 5<sup>9</sup> on the Interpretation of the End in the Constitutions 1968-1969.

The contents of Article 5 and its note, represent two cultures and two ways of seeing and locating oneself in the Congregation, opposed, not totally, thanks be to God, but easily situated according to geography. To the English-speaking groups, it seemed that a very radical and unilateral interpretation was given to the text about the end approved in 1968 (Article 5) and they asked the Assembly for a true interpretation. It was said that the unity of the Congregation was at risk. The motion was put to vote and it was approved in its two parts. The Congregation was not split but, besides other issues, there was evidence of the division and existent polarization in relation to its identity and identification.

The 35<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in 1974<sup>10</sup> was not able to, nor did it want to, do anything in connection with this Note and its implications on the identity/identification of the Congregation. It deliberately opted not to touch the Constitutions — except for the chapter on government. It dedicated itself to evaluate the experiences and initiatives made by the provinces in connection with the Constitutions and Statutes *ad experimentum* of the 1968-1969 Assembly and to elaborate some *Declarations*.<sup>11</sup>

After presenting "The Way of St. Vincent" (D 14-15) and "Our Way" (D 16-18), and taking into account "the change of perspectives

<sup>9</sup> I transcribe that Note because it is of maximum importance for the topic that concerns us: "In the 62<sup>nd</sup> Session, on 3 July 1969, the Assembly declared that the following propositions are true interpretations of the text approved on the End of the Congregation: 1) the evangelization and human and Christian promotion of the poor is the predominant end, but not the only end of the Congregation of the Mission; 2) the evangelization and the human and Christian promotion of the poor is criteria sufficient in itself, but not necessary, to choose our works."

<sup>10</sup> The XXXV GA-74 took place in Rome (16 August - 23 September). Outlined and carried out as an Assembly of Extension and Transition for that of 1980, which would be the final constituent one, it was given four tasks, of which the two principal ones are those mentioned in the text.

<sup>11</sup> The Assembly proposed them in order to illuminate, to stimulate and to direct the effort of the whole Congregation and of each of its members (D. 13). They were promulgated by the Superior General, Fr. J.W. Richardson, on 23 September 1974. They are a rereading of the Constitutions 68-69, focusing and enriching with new lights the more difficult and burning articles. They are much more radical in connection with the evangelization of the poor than the Constitutions 68-69. Cf. DD 17, 22, 25, 29. The evangelization of the poor as End and the End as Vocation appear in the DD 24 and 25, respectively. Vocation is the title under which the Declarations 23-26 are collected. It will pass as the title of the First Part of the Constitutions 80, gathering up the articles that refers finally to the *End, Nature and Spirit* of the C.M.

in the world and in the Church" (D 19-22), the General Assembly of 1974 presented what it called "Our Vocation" (D 23-26). The term that becomes the title — and it will continue as title in the Constitutions of 1980 — comes from a text of St. Vincent de Paul (SV II, 14) that mentions it and that, in the context of the D 24 and 25, refers to and is identified with the end.

Passing over the famous interpretive note of the Constitutions and Statutes 1968-1969 and mystifying matters a little, the General Assembly of 1974 presents *the evangelization of the poor* as "our end," "our sign, the reason for being of our life and the backbone of everything." St. Vincent mentions: "This is our peculiar calling, to be dedicated to the poor like Jesus Christ. Consequently, our vocation is the continuation of his vocation...."

"In the light of this end," which is our *vocation*, we will devote ourselves to all the rest: "to form worthy ministers and priests, to work for the most urgent needs of the Church" (D 25). It will direct (D 26) our spirituality, our apostolic works, our community life, formation, our community organization. In the Constitutions of 1980 (Article 9), this *vocation*, "that is to say, the end, nature and spirit (will direct) the life and the organization of the Congregation" (which in the Constitutions, form its remaining Parts II and III).

## The End of the Search. General Assembly 1980

In the General Assembly of 1980 it was desired that Article 9, which the D 26 summarized, would be the hinge that unites Part I of the Constitutions (Vocation) with the other two parts (Life and Organization). But evidently it is much more than a hinge. It encompasses the logical and moral imperative of directing everything; that is to say, of guiding, focusing, advancing, and arriving at the goals and then evaluating everything in the only light of our Vocation (End-Nature-Spirit) at the service of the evangelization of the poor. And it expresses, with clarity, what is the identity and the identification of the Congregation, "our sign, our reason for being and our backbone" (D 25).

The 36<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in 1980<sup>12</sup> was convoked by the Superior General Fr. James W. Richardson on 28 May 1978. Its

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<sup>12</sup> It was held in Rome, in the year of the 150th Anniversary of the Appearances of the Virgin of the Miraculous Medal, from 16 June until 8 August — 54 days! — the longest GA in the C.M., with 119 confreres, median age 50.91 years (3 years older than that of the first GA/68, but still younger than the average age of the C.M.). The Congregation had diminished by 1640 members (28.4%): 743 priests, 181 brothers and 720 students. After 12 years of Renovation...!

preparation<sup>13</sup> was intense, putting the whole Congregation in a "state of General Assembly" from 1977 on. The Preparatory Commission for the General Assembly of 1980 and the Subcommittee for the juridical part of the Constitutions in their relationship with Canon Law (although not published) contributed greatly to it. The Superior General named the commission and the subcommittee in 1975 and 1977, respectively. Their work finished on 13 March 1980, with the elaboration of the *Documentum Laboris*, called by many the Green Book that was a very good working tool, contrary to the sadly famous Black Book of the first Assembly.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit and informed and motivated by the Report of the Superior General, Fr. J.W. Richardson, and conscious of their historical role, the 119 confreres in the Assembly began their work. The adventure that had lasted 12 years, that of *aggiornamento* and of the search for the identity/identification of the Congregation today, finally ended. The "hour of truth" had arrived, the hour to give an attractive, modern and finished "look" to the Congregation, with some definitive Constitutions that Rome would have to approve and whose revision would no longer be possible except after some five or six more Instrums.

For its work, the Commission on the End<sup>14</sup> did not start at zero nor unilaterally of its own ideas. It elaborated the titled "First Document" on the end, keeping in mind the number and the importance, the reasoning and the options of the provinces, according to the *Documentum Laboris*.<sup>15</sup> The options of the immense majority were for the evangelization of the poor as the only end, basing their reasons on fidelity to St. Vincent, the call of the Church to modernize the Congregation, and the growing needs of the poor.

Why could not the reference with respect to the End of the Congregation be approved before,<sup>16</sup> so that it could have influenced

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Vincentiana* 24, 1980/1-2, 18-29.

<sup>14</sup> This is how the committee was called in shortened form and was composed of Frs. Elduayen (President), Maloney (Secretary), Maside, McCullen, Morin and Dulucq. The elected Superior General, Fr. McCullen, replaced himself on the Commission with the brand new assistant Fr. V. Zico. Within the Commission and with regard to the End, in a proportion of 4 to 2, the two mentalities and tendencies were present that polarized the Assembly.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Article of Fr. J.P. Renouard in *Vincentiana* 24, 1980/1-2, 25-28.

<sup>16</sup> The first ones voted on in the afternoon of 19 June were also the first ones presented as Commission to the Full Assembly on the afternoon of Monday, 23 June, and the last ones for the approval of the final text, on the next to last day of the Assembly, 6 August. The work of the Commission and its progress were heldup permanently by means of motions, petitions and parliamentary subterfuges. Some of the arguments presented can be summarized this way: 1. the End proposed by the Commission means a change in relation to the foundation of the end proposed by St. Vincent, not

and given direction<sup>17</sup> in the elaboration of the Constitutions of 1980? Although the Commission, "in its majority," had no doubts about what the provinces wanted, nor consequently on the content of the First Document to be presented to the Assembly, it preferred to be firm in requesting an indicative vote on this issue of "great magnitude": *Does the C.M. have one solitary end or more than one?*<sup>18</sup> The Assembly pronounced absolutely for a single end. From this moment on the Commission on the End began working on the text on Vocation, including the Introduction, despite the obstacles and difficulties.

The proposal of the Commission represented *a change in the profile, not in the end*. In terms of the Constitutions, it only meant to turn back to the content of the note approved in the 62nd Session of the General Assembly of 1969. Against that which was then approved, it was now proposed, although in a simpler and more evangelical way that *the End of the Congregation is to follow Jesus Christ Evangelizer of the Poor*. In terms of vocation and of identity/identification, the Assembly recognized and reaffirmed (87 *yes* and 24 *no* in the vote of 25 July), to have *only one end* and that, as it was for Jesus Christ, this end consists in *evangelizing the poor*, which becomes a password of that which it can and ought to be.

With this proclamation of the unique end and with no major resistances to the contents on the nature and the spirit, it was only a matter of time, maturation and patience to the approbation of the

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just in its form; 2. It goes against the tradition and the history of the Congregation which it has lived and worked in peace and harmony with the end proposed by St. Vincent. 3. The formation of the clergy is left aside or denaturalized. 4. The concept of *end* is ambiguous. In each country and language there are distinct concepts and many synonyms of the term *end*. Look for another word or do not speak of End.... 5. The proposed End is a personal position, never as acceptable as the one proposed by St. Vincent, etc. Some subterfuges that were rejected, but which took up a lot of time were: 1. to change the text of the Document on the End, either by asking the Plenary Session to reconsider the approval already given or introduce into it literally article 1.1. of the Common Rules, or by changing the composition of the commission; 2. to put into the Introduction the end of the Common Rules. and then seek that the Introduction become part of the Constitutions; 3. to place quotes of St. Vincent in the approved texts....

<sup>17</sup> In the sense of the Declaration 26 or of Article 9 of the current Constitutions.

<sup>18</sup> During the whole morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> the discussions were very animated, the seven Groups, and five members of the Assembly in their own names, exposed arguments, quotations, explanations, definitions, etc., in favor of a single end or of several ends. With a majority vote in favor of only one end, the Commission presented its First Document, the one that five Groups (against two) pronounced in favor, and was voted upon and approved, passing to the Second Document (needed to continue ahead without going back).

final text on Vocation<sup>19</sup> and of the Constitutions.<sup>20</sup> Seen in their context (from 1968 to 1980), what had been accomplished was due to a great effort and marked the end of an adventure. There it was, the new face of the Congregation, its rejuvenated personality, the clearer mark of its essence, its essential element (beyond that which is only integral or institutional mediation or specific end), the mirror in which it must look to know what it is and how it must be in all circumstances, its identity/identification.

## Identity Rediscovered

After 12 years of search and experimentation (1968-1980), the Congregation redefined its identity in the Constitutions of 1980 — Congregation, who do you say that you are?, was the question asked by the Church (LG) —, and its *identification* — how do you want to be recognized and what is it that you want to do in the modern world? (GS). At the same time it set down the bases for its location in the Code of Canon Law.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps it was not perfect, but it was the best thing that, given all the circumstances, we were able to put together. This is what we took back to the houses (this issue had given so much worry to some of the Assembly's participants). Had it been worthwhile to invest so much time, effort and energy?<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The blockage for the final approval of the text on the end was solved by means of a consensual promise on the part of the Italian speaking group: the word "praesertim" was removed and replaced by the word "perficitur." Thus, the text of the Commission on "Vocation" was approved by 109 votes, with 5 against, three days before the end of the GA.

<sup>20</sup> The Superior General, Fr. Richard McCullen promulgated on 27 September 1980, the Constitutions approved by the Assembly on 8 August, they were taken to the SCRIS for its approval on 18 March 1981. The Constitutions approved by the SCRIS four years later, went into effect on 25 January 1983.

<sup>21</sup> The CIC would be published on 25 January 1983. One of the concerns of GA-80 had to do with our future inclusion in this CIC. It was decided to stay faithful to the patrimony of the Congregation, inherited from St. Vincent, and to await the course of events. In the end, the CIC opened up, to accommodate us, the Section on Societies of Apostolic Life cc. 731-746, and the SCRIS approved our Constitutions, thus our situation at least in the juridical sense was improved (*Vincentiana*, 1985/1, 146).

<sup>22</sup> In general, we value in the Constitutions their rich and dense content and, in the Vincentian aspect, the rather successful effort at giving them their specific mark and character. Chapters like those on Community Life (II) and on Prayer (IV) that began being very general (valid for any Religious Institute), finished being quite specific. On the other hand, seen in its context,

With regards to what was the main problem of our identity/identification and *aggiornamento*, what do the new Constitutions say in Articles 1-9, Vocation? Enough, yet not enough. Enough if one thinks of the progress made and in the great clarification and successful consciousness-raising (in missionaries and provinces) to overcome the cultural differences and reasonable interests created, with faith, good will and a lot of love for the Congregation. Not enough, if one looks at the deficiencies which these very achievements present and, above all, the inconsistencies of the rest of the Constitutions with regard to the End.<sup>23</sup>

Beginning with the title of the First Part, the good aspect of the term *Vocation* is that it contains a "call" that gives unity and sense of being to the works of the Congregation. It tells us to what we have been called. The bad thing is that it does not tell us anything of itself until we read it in the light of what comes next. Vocation for the Mission or simply *Mission*,<sup>24</sup> as was suggested in the Assembly, it would be much more important to speak of Community for the Mission, Formation for the *Mission*, etc.

Having pointed out to the Congregation its single end, that of following Christ the Evangelizer of the poor, is, without a doubt and in many aspects, the maximum achievement of the *aggiornamento* of its identity/identification.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, it responds to the charism and intention of St. Vincent first of all; and, secondly, it makes basic and orients what has to be our life and organization. For the three constituent Assemblies the end was the persistent issue. The successes or mistakes in the 146 remaining articles of the Constitutions come from the way they approximate to a greater or lesser degree the proposed end.<sup>26</sup> By sticking firmly and faithfully to

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they had gained much in internal unity and in clarity and differentiation of what is the essential element in them from what is the integral element.

<sup>23</sup> The evangelization of the poor is present in them, but not omnipresent as it ought to be, that is to say, it does not seem to be like a dynamic, uniting, overwhelming and permanent reference. Maybe, as I said already, for not having had from the beginning of the work the definitive text on the End, with its directing light. Cf. the inconsistencies, with regard to the end, of Articles 11, 12.1, 18, Cf. note 38.

<sup>24</sup> Mission in the sense of the evangelization of the poor, as it is explained in St. Vincent and in the tradition of C.M. Mission and non missions that are among us the first institutional mediation to carry out the Mission.

<sup>25</sup> To be defined for the proposed end supposes to have solved positively, at least in theory, the two underlying problems to the question on *one or more ends*: 1. only the poor or also others, and 2. what class of poor.

<sup>26</sup> Although the text of the End did not come out until the conclusion of the Assembly it was definitely felt where the majority was headed and the Vincentian charism and formation received from seminary days directed this majority. For that reason, the evangelization of the poor is very present in all the Constitutions. Cf. note 35.

the end we are able to salvage unity (communion) and diversity (in the provinces with their cultural and traditional differences) and make authentic their diversified apostolates (Articles 2, 11-15, etc.).

The proposed end projected light and spontaneously initiated additions and fundamental renovations above all in the three ideas which St. Vincent called the ends. In turn, these ideas were more suitable in obtaining the end of the Congregation. Without a doubt St. Vincent would have left them to us *today* in this way (Articles 1.1°, 2° and 3°) with the nuances and additions that they have:

- 1°, “the *personal* perfection to which one must dedicate himself” refers less to each one’s own spirituality, as is usually understood, than to the spiritual life which must be in harmony with the Spirit that led Jesus to evangelize the poor; that is to say, the “personal” perfection of the missionary, *appropriate* with his spirit as the actual text states;<sup>27</sup>
- 2°, puts before us the end of the Congregation; that is to say that, for the C.M. missionary, the poor and their evangelization are not an option but a vow that one takes for one’s whole life (stability). The option is for the most abandoned poor...; and
- 3°, it duplicates (better, it multiplies) the pastoral agents (clergy and *laity*) that will take care of the poor, because we will have formed them and sensitized them to make an option for the poor.

With regard to the nature of the Community, the Commission and the Assembly found that the proposed text was correct and precise and therefore, voted with a YES almost unanimously.<sup>28</sup> It defined the Congregation as an “apostolic society, secular in its own way, clerical, with life in common, and exempt....” Everything was there. But the SCRIS “in looking over” the text, said that the description was vague and that the term “*secular*” should be removed or explained better. The General Council had to redo Article 3;<sup>29</sup> it was left as it is in the actual Constitutions: the *pastoral identity* (according to the end) and the *juridical identity* (according to the

<sup>27</sup> The GA agreed not to put quotations in the text from St. Vincent or from other sources. The one who put St. Vincent’s quote in 1.1. did not choose the most appropriate according to the context and, above all, it was not noticed that the spirit of which one speaks is clearly expressed in Articles 5-8 on the spirit of the Congregation, especially Article 5.

<sup>28</sup> Thirty-one Provinces out of 40 accepted the text of the SCI (Subcommittee for the Juridical Part of the Constitutions). In the Assembly this text was approved almost unanimously.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Vincentiana*, 1985/1, 92.



Code of Canon Law, 731) were acceptable, but our *secular identity* was weak, being seen only in its historical-pastoral sense.

As to this identity, as the Constitutions (Article 3.2) present it, there is a lack of consistency. Before, our secularity was defined by saying what we were not: *We are not religious*. But, what is our secular status, in a *positive description*? Certainly it is much more than the exercise of the "apostolate in intimate cooperation with the bishops" (Article 3.2). That we are "secular priests," "*we are of the religion of St. Peter,*"<sup>30</sup> as St. Vincent would say, contains much more than mere cooperation, even if it be a very profound cooperation.

The *secular identity* of our Congregation and that of the missionaries, means that *it has its roots* (incarnated, in the context of the mystery of the Incarnation), *its way of life* (in residences and not in convents, nor in religious communities but in fraternal life in common), *its commitment to God* (through the evangelization of the poor, which is reinforced by the vows that we make) and *its apostolate* (autonomous or exempt by special concession to be better able to evangelize the poor and the cultures) *in the secular*.

The *spiritual identity* of the Congregation is expressed mainly in Article 5. The text on the spirit of the Congregation (Articles 5.8) seems to be a summary of our spirituality which is Cristocentric (Article 5), Trinitarian, providential, filled with compassionate and effective charity towards the poor (Article 6), missionary and adorned with the missionary's virtues (Article 7), always searching (Article 8). It contains certainly all that, but, in the context of Vocation, it would be a sin to limit it to be our life in the Spirit. In terms of identity/identification, it is the very "form of the Nature and End of the Congregation.

Having defined the spirit of the Congregation as *a participation in the Holy Spirit*, who anointed and sent forth Jesus to evangelize the poor, what Article 5 says is like a resonance to our fundamental charism. It is placed here to be before all the forming spirit of our identity that gives a missionary soul to the nature of the Congregation and urges the missionary toward the end of the Congregation.

Most decidedly, with regard to our identity/identification, the Constitutions tell us that we are a Congregation of Christians, priests or lay, but all equally missionaries, that the Spirit calls and urges (Article 5) to continue the evangelizing mission of Jesus with the poor (Article 1), from the world of the poor and with autonomy (secularity and exemption, Article 3.2). *To better achieve this end*, we follow the proposal, the way and the style of St. Vincent de Paul, approved by the Church. That is to say, that with sights always on *the mission*, we join to live fraternally in common life, we take some

<sup>30</sup> CEME, *Conferencias a los misioneros*, n. 1110.



vows that reinforce and stabilize our vocation-mission, and we give ourselves some Constitutions that rule our life and that guarantee us, if we follow them, our personal holiness. The first part of this description contains the essential makeup of our identity/identification; the second part, its integral makeup.

It is the hope that in the next General Assembly which revises the Constitutions, with the experience of the last 20 years and in the context of the New Evangelization and its inculturation, the Congregation can give itself Constitutions that are needed to respond to the more globalized world in this century. Constitutions that express, with greater clarity and determination than the current ones, our Vocation for the Mission.

(ARTHUR J. KOLINSKY, C.M., translator)

# The Apostolic Works of the Congregation of the Mission

(Constitutions 10-18; Statutes 1-12)

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## Constitutions (10-18) and Statutes (1-12)

The final article of the chapter of the Constitutions dealing with the Congregation's apostolic works, puts before us the figure of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37), a source of inspiration for St. Vincent who gave effective help to the poor and abandoned. In the light of this example, *"... provinces and members should earnestly strive to serve those rejected by society and those who are victims of disasters and injustices of every kind. We should also assist those who suffer from forms of moral poverty which are peculiar to our own times. Working for all of these and with them, members should endeavour to implement the demands of social justice and evangelical charity"* (C. 18).

The text of article 18 makes explicit mention of some particular elements. For example, it speaks of the charity which makes us concerned for all forms of suffering and causes us to seek effective means of remedying them; it mentions in particular, the way we are to work with, and for, the poor, because they are the principal agents, the prime movers and those most responsible for their human development, their evangelisation and their salvation, as Paul VI declared in the Apostolic Exhortation *Populorum Progressio* (n. 15). But there are other elements, too, that are evoked by the figure of the Good Samaritan and the intentions that Jesus had in mind when he told this parable. The story of the Good Samaritan is told in response to the lawyer who asked Jesus what he should do in order to inherit eternal life. Jesus replied that the man needed to obey the law and the commandments. The lawyer knew these by heart: "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself." Jesus praised him, saying: "You have answered right, do this and life is yours." But the man was anxious to justify himself and said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"

In reply to this question, Jesus did not define the term "neighbour" but gave the example of someone who showed himself a neighbour to a man who had been stripped by bandits and robbed of all he possessed: this happened on the very road where a priest and a Levite had earlier passed him by. In our own case, we will be judged on our love, and what is fundamentally important is not that we should know the identity of our neighbour but rather that we should be a neighbour to those in need. It will be the same at the Last Judgement: we will be saved, not because we knew that the person in distress was Christ, but because we helped the unfortunate people who were suffering, hungry, sick, lonely and abandoned. What would lead to our condemnation would be that we had not gone to the aid of these suffering people.

Perhaps the priest and the Levite were in a hurry to get to the temple, to "fulfil" their religious duties. For this reason, Jesus replaces religious structures with charitable service that is in line with the teaching of the prophets. Isaiah speaks in the name of God, and cries out, "What are your endless sacrifices to me? says Yahweh. I am sick of holocausts of rams and the fat of calves. The blood of bulls and of goats revolts me. When you come to present yourselves before me, who asked you to trample over my courts? Bring me your worthless offerings no more.... When you stretch out your hands I turn my eyes away. You may multiply your prayers, I shall not listen. Your hands are covered with blood, wash, make yourselves clean. Take your wrongdoing out of my sight. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good, search for justice, help the oppressed, be just to the orphan, plead for the widow" (Is 1:11-12, 15-17). "Is that the sort of fast that pleases me, a truly penitential day for men? Hanging your head like a reed, lying down on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call fasting, a day acceptable to Yahweh? Is not this the sort of fast that pleases me — it is the Lord Yahweh who speaks — to break unjust fetters and undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the unjust go free, and break every yoke, to share your bread with the hungry and shelter the homeless poor, to clothe the man you see to be naked and not turn from your own kin" (Is 58:5-7).

We can read similar denunciations in Micah (6:6-8), Hosea (6:6), Zecharia (7:5, 9-10). We have to let ourselves be touched by the ardour and the vehemence of the prophets' social message if we are to understand the charity that St. Vincent de Paul found so urgently compelling: "The charity of Jesus Christ crucified urges us on" (cf. 2 Cor 5:14). The Book of Ecclesiasticus uses very strong terms to declare: "The sacrifice of an offering unjustly acquired is a mockery; the gifts of impious men are unacceptable. The Most High takes no pleasure in offerings from the godless, multiplying sacrifices will not gain him pardon from sin. Offering sacrifice from the property of the poor is as bad as slaughtering a son before his father's very eyes. A meagre diet is the very life of the poor, he who withholds it is a man of blood. A man murders his neighbour if he

robs him of his livelihood, sheds blood if he withholds an employee's wages" (Si 34:18-22).

This is the spirit that should animate all our apostolic activity. Our task as Vincentians is set out in articles 10 and 11 of our Constitutions: we are called to evangelise the poor. Like all the members of the Church we can declare that this is our grace, our special vocation and the most fundamental element of our identity (cf. EN 14). So it is precisely our insertion in the mission of the Church which gives added importance to our vocation. The Church is conscious of sharing in Christ's divine mission. Christ presents this to us in his merciful, compassionate love which is the source of all our apostolic activity and which urges us "to make the Gospel effective" (SVP XI, 391). Evangelisation has this objective in mind: "That all people, through conversion and through the sacraments, may adhere to the Kingdom, that is to say, to the 'new world,' to the new state of things, to the new manner of being, of living, of living in community, which the Gospel inaugurates" (EN 23).

According to the definitive teaching of Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, "to evangelise is first of all to bear witness, in a simple and direct way, to God revealed by Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit; to bear witness that in his Son God has loved the world — that in his Incarnate Word he has given being to all things and has called men to eternal life" (EN 26).

The words of Jesus "unveil the secret of God, his designs and his promises, and so they have the power to change men's hearts and their destiny. But Jesus also proclaims salvation through many signs that leave the crowds awe-struck [...]: sick people are cured, water is turned into wine, loaves are multiplied, the dead are raised to life, and more importantly than all these, is his own resurrection. And among all these signs there is one to which he attaches great importance: the humble and the poor are evangelised, become his disciples and gather together 'in his name' in the great community of those who believe in him" (EN 11-12). Through the death of Jesus, paschal freedom destroys every form of slavery and the resurrection creates all the good things that come with liberty. This is not a question of "private" liberation since it has a social and political dimension. Christ did not want to adopt a temporal-political stance, he resisted the temptation to take power, and he refused to allow the people to make him king and lead them in the struggle against domination by Herod or the Romans. Jesus was against all forms of privilege and inequality because God is the same Father for all people. He called the poor and the marginalised to become part of the Kingdom. For this reason, all authentic liberation in history, every striving for justice, every option for the poor and the most abandoned, always refers back to Christ. (Cf. SEGUNDO GALILEA, *Teologia da Libertação. Ensaio de Síntese*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., São Paulo: Paulinas, 1979; 57-60).

In answer to the Baptist's questions, Jesus validated his mission by pointing to his works, the very works that Isaiah had foretold (61:1-2): "The blind see again, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life" and he adds "*the Good News is proclaimed to the poor*" (Mt 11:2-6).

Article 12 of the Constitutions lists the fundamental characteristics of the evangelisation works undertaken by the Congregation. The text is perfectly clear so I will only highlight three aspects: preference for the poor, attention to the realities of present-day society, and the evangelising potential of the poor.

1. We Vincentians have no need to make a preferential option for the poor because our option is even more pressing. We inherit from St. Vincent the option that the saint himself made, *a fundamental option for the poor*. This means that our option for the poor is fundamental and radical; that is, it should be at the root, it should be the basis of everything that we do, every choice we make, all the works we undertake. For us it is a matter of seeing the poor, of finding out where they are, or where they are hiding themselves, and then going out to them. For Jesus, the poor meant the sick, the marginalised, those discriminated against because of race, social status or religion; those who, like the lepers, were obliged to live apart, those who were reduced to mere objects of pleasure or the subject of condemnation, such as the prostitutes, the humiliated, the poor and those who had been "made poor" by invaders or dominant powers in the country. For St. Vincent, the poor were the men and women of the poor country areas who had been abandoned by the clergy and religious, children, especially the foundlings, girls who were victims of the soldiery, peasants whose lands were devastated by the troops, old people with no family, families without shelter or anywhere to live, men condemned to the galleys, the starving, men who were wounded in the war, the soldiers and even the nobility when these became "the bashful poor," and all who were "made poor," those reduced to poverty by different adverse and tragic circumstances of history.

At Puebla, the bishops of Latin America gave us a picture of the suffering face of Christ in our times (cf., 30-39). In this context it is always necessary to emphasise the part played by systems, or rather, to point out that these poor people are in this situation because of sinful structures, of poverty-inducing mechanisms, international exploitation, uncontrolled industrialisation and an alarming growth in urbanisation. St. Vincent told us that we have to *turn the medal over* (cf., SVP XI, 725), so that we can look beyond these human appearances.

In Santo Domingo (1992), the Latin American bishops made this declaration: "We need to extend the list of suffering faces that we spoke about at Puebla; faces disfigured by hunger, terrified by violence, grown old through living in subhuman conditions, worn out

with the worry of providing for a family. The Lord is asking us to be able to discover his own countenance in the suffering faces of our brothers and sisters" (cf., 179d).

In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI referred to all "the peoples engaged with all their energy in the effort and struggle to overcome everything which condemns them to remain on the margin of life: famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty, injustices in international relations and especially in commercial exchanges, situations of economic and cultural neo-colonialism sometimes as cruel as the old political colonialism." The Pope went on to add: "The Church has the duty to proclaim the liberation of millions of human beings, many of whom are her own children — the duty of assisting at the birth of this liberation, of giving witness to it, of ensuring that it is complete. This is not foreign to evangelisation" (30).

In our times there are new categories of poor people who, paradoxically, are the fruit of a civilisation that enjoys advanced technology, and for whom Paul VI told us at our General Assembly of 1974, "You continue to be the hope of the poor" (*Vincentiana*, 1974/6, 463; *L'Osservatore Romano*, 19-IX-1974). We may think, for example, of those on drugs, drug addicts, immigrants, illegal immigrants, AIDS victims, those who have been kidnapped, the victims of terrorism, etc.

2. A second feature that should characterise our apostolic work is *attention to present-day realities*. We find an echo of this and some concrete proposals as to its implementation in Articles 8 and 9 of the Statutes of the Congregation, which ask us to foster inter-provincial meetings for the purpose of deepening our knowledge of the vocation of missionaries and of those pastoral methods which more effectively meet the actual conditions and changes of situations and people. They ask us to establish Provincial Norms governing social action and to determine concrete means for hastening the coming of social justice; similarly, they ask us to cooperate with associations that are concerned with the defence of human rights and the promotion of justice and peace. Obviously, such tasks are very difficult because of the complexity of the realities in which we live and work.

Theology teaches that there is unity and continuity in God's designs for the world between creation and salvation; that is to say, between the task of building the world (history, society) and salvation, or in other words, between the struggle for liberation and the actions that bring us salvation. Paul VI tells us in EN: "With regard to the liberation which evangelisation proclaims and strives to put into practice, one should rather say this: — it cannot be contained in the simple and restricted dimension of economics, politics, social or cultural life; it must envisage the whole man, in all his aspects, right up to and including his openness to the absolute, even the divine Absolute; — it is therefore attached to a certain

concept of man which it can never sacrifice to the needs of any strategy, practice or short-term efficiency" (33).

3. *The evangelising potential of the poor*: St. Vincent often taught us that we should learn from the poor. One of the distinctive marks of our Congregation is that we are to allow the poor to evangelise us.

Puebla had some very trenchant comments to make about the evangelising power of the poor. Santo Domingo put this idea before us once again, this time in the wider context of solidarity even though the bishops did not sufficiently emphasise here the role of the poor as *agents* of evangelisation: "To evangelise is to do what Jesus Christ did when he declared in the synagogue that he had come 'to evangelise' the poor (cf., Lk 4:18-19). 'He was rich, but he became poor for your sake, to make you rich out of his poverty' (2 Cor 8:9). Christ challenges us to give, as he did, an authentic witness to evangelical poverty by our lifestyle and in our Church structures.

This is the basis for our commitment to a gospel-based preferential option for the poor, the firm and irrevocable, but not exclusive or excluding, commitment so solemnly pledged at the Bishops' Conferences in Medellín and Puebla. Following the example of Jesus, we will make this preferential option the inspiration for all our works of personal and communal evangelisation (cf., SRS 42, RH 14; JOHN PAUL II, *Inaugural Discourse*, 16). It is with the 'evangelising potential of the poor' (P 1147), that the Church which is also poor, wishes to inspire the evangelisation of our communities" (SD 178a-b).

It is in this context that we should interpret the chapter on the Apostolic Works of the Congregation and it is in the light of these declarations that we should be looking at our works, especially those described in Articles 14 (popular missions), 15 (formation of the clergy and the laity), 16 (missions "ad Gentes" and other similar missions) and 17 (helping the Daughters of Charity and collaborating with them). And it is in this same context that our works have to be incorporated into the pastoral activity of the local Church (C. 13). We are particularly called to evaluate our parishes according to the criteria set down in Article 10 of the Statutes.

In our reflections, in our encounters with the poor and with the Evangeliser of the Poor, we would do well to ask ourselves: "Are the sufferings of the poor 'our burden and our sorrow' as they were for St. Vincent? How do we rate our works and our pastoral endeavours before the judgement seat of the poor?"



## Which works should we be taking on?

Even in St. Vincent's day, the Congregation had different types of foundations. Historians classify them in three groups:

- a) *Foundations for mission work*: Toul, Aiguillon, Richelieu, Troyes, Alet, Annecy, Cr cy, Montmirail.
- b) There was also the work of *preparing ordinands* in Aiguillon *retreats for ordinands and for the clergy* in Richelieu (diocese of Poitou), work with ordinands and retreats for the clergy at Troyes, an unsuccessful project to open a seminary in Alet, and the first seminary, that functioned in Annecy.
- c) *Seminaries* were the main objective of the foundations made at Cahors, Marseilles, Saint M  en, Tr guier, Agen, P rigueux, Montpellier and Narbonne (cf., LUIGI MEZZADRI - JOS   MAR  A ROM  N, *Historia de la Congregaci  n de la Misi  n*, Vol. 1, Madrid: La Milagrosa, 1992; 37-38).

There is no absolute parallel between the works of the Congregation of the Mission in St. Vincent's time and the works of the Congregation today. Sometimes we criticise a work on the grounds that it is not Vincentian. Most criticism is directed at our parishes and, to a somewhat lesser degree, at our schools and colleges. Many people also complain that we have to give good (and sometimes many) confreres in the provinces to the work of being Provincial Director of the Daughters of Charity.

**What are the criteria for judging whether an apostolic work is Vincentian?** These criteria are to be found in Article 13 of the Constitutions and in the corresponding Statutes.

Article 13 has this to say: *"The provinces themselves will decide the forms of apostolate to be undertaken so that, faithful to the spirit and example of St. Vincent, their apostolate may be incorporated into the pastoral activity of the local Church in conformity with the documents and instructions of the Holy See, the episcopal conferences, and the diocesan bishops."*

1. *The Provinces themselves will decide the forms of apostolate to be undertaken.*

The Provinces, not the Congregation. So the list of works and the reasons for doing them is to be found in the Provincial Norms (PN) rather than in the Constitutions. The PN have to be drawn up during a Provincial Assembly (PA) and be approved by the Superior General with the consent of his council, in conformity with Articles 143, 1<sup>o</sup> and 107, 12<sup>o</sup> of the Constitutions and Article 93 of the Statutes.

We know that it is the responsibility of Provincial Assemblies to undertake the revision of works and we know how this is carried out.



We are not always very objective in our evaluation of "our" works and those of our confreres. As a result, there are norms that reflect the ideological conflicts that arose during the PA. At the General Council, the Superior General and his Assistants compare the Provincial Norms with the Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation while at the same time keeping in mind the directives of Canon Law and other Church documents, etc., as stated in Article 13.

2. In deciding which forms of the apostolate they are to retain, the provinces have to remain *faithful to the spirit and example of St. Vincent*. Our primary loyalty is to the roots and the tradition of the Congregation, but also to the dynamism of the Vincentian spirit, the Vincentian charism, which is a grace that God gave to the Church in the person of St. Vincent and in his foundations.

In St. Vincent we find *the example*, the works he undertook and which he committed other pastoral workers from among the clergy and the laity to do. We also find *the spirit of St. Vincent*, the spirit that animated him and brought him to accept other works which did not seem to fulfil the conditions he himself laid down. For example, St. Vincent wanted us to be missionaries and not to be thinking of parishes. But he also talked quite calmly about the parishes he had accepted. What criteria did St. Vincent use here and what was his intention in accepting a parish?

In some provinces parishes were accepted after seminary work was abandoned and in order to find work for (to occupy) confreres who had retired from the seminaries (or whom the bishops had dispensed). In many cases this was done without a process of reflection, without opting for the poorest areas, and without giving the confreres adequate training for their new ministries and for integration into the pastoral work of the diocese, etc. One began one's work as curate or as parish priest in the way that one had worked as a professor, with the knowledge and experience one already had — or did not have.

The solution is not to abandon the parishes we have at present, but rather to include parishes in the list of our other works to be revised.

We know that time passes very swiftly and that changes come whether we want them or not. For this reason, nobody should be surprised or scandalised if the criteria presented in the Constitutions and Statutes are still inadequate or incomplete, and if we do not find them very clear.

After the Constitutions were drawn up at the General Assembly of 1980, we had the 1986 Assembly which gave us the *Lines of Action 1986-1992*, the 1992 Assembly that gave us the *Letter to the Confreres*, the commitments concerning New Evangelisation, New Men, New Communities; and the 1998 Assembly that gave us the document:

*With the Vincentian Family, We Face the Challenges of the Mission at the Threshold of the New Millennium.* In addition, from 1980 until the present day, we have had meetings and activities which produced final documents dealing with the points we are discussing. At the Visitors' Meeting in Bogotá (1983) the topics for special study were popular missions and the formation of the clergy; the Visitors' Meeting in Rio de Janeiro (1989) saw the revision of the Lines of Action for 1986-1992, and proposals were prepared for the Superior General and his council with regard to animation of the provinces. The General Council wrote the annual reflection document of 1988 on the subject of animating the laity in their formation. At the Meeting of Visitors in Salamanca (1996), the Superior General, Fr. Robert P. Maloney, presented criteria to be used in evaluating the Vincentian character of a parish. These texts contain a whole list of criteria that can give us guidance in revising, planning and reassessing works if we wish to be "faithful to the spirit and example of St. Vincent" (cf. *Vincentiana*, 1996/4-5, 220-227; 1997/2, 105-116; 1997/3, 165-185).

3. Article 13 of the Constitutions presents a further requirement: that of *incorporating our apostolate into the pastoral activity of the local Church*. The first reason for doing this is that we are sent on mission: we do not have the monopoly of mission work; we do not own this apostolate. A second reason is that we lack the appropriate training and so we have to learn from others. The third reason is that we have to work at a Church apostolate, not "our" apostolate, and certainly not "my" apostolate.

4. We have to work in conformity with *the documents and instructions of the Holy See, the episcopal conferences, and the diocesan bishops*. This will help us in two ways. In the first place, we will avoid the problems created by certain bishops who have their own, very individual ideas, which they would like to impose on all diocesan priests or religious working in their diocese. The general guidelines given by an Episcopal Conference are usually very valid and inspiring. We might think, for example, of these Conferences at Medellín (1968), Puebla (1979), and Santo Domingo (1992). Secondly, it will help us to have a better understanding of our exemption from the jurisdiction of the bishops and put this into practice. There are some confreres who do not obey the Visitors or keep to provincial guidelines because they say they have to be part of the diocesan programme of apostolic works. But neither do they obey the bishop or implement his guidelines because they say that they have to follow the norms and the guidelines of the Congregation. They do this so as to avoid making their annual retreat.

5. Finally, *those who benefit from our apostolate, according to Article 18 of the Constitutions, are people who are rejected by society* (today we would say they are excluded from society, either as

individuals or as a social class or as a category of people that are universally rejected), victims of disasters (and sometimes victims of people who come to help but then exploit them), *victims of all kinds of injustices, and those who suffer from various forms of moral poverty.*

6. Article 2 of the Statutes adds some important elements to this list of criteria or guidelines. It points out that *"In the modern world, atheism and materialism strongly challenge our faith and the traditional methods of evangelising. Therefore, members should carefully study the causes of this phenomenon, realising that in this situation they are called upon to give witness to a stronger personal faith in the living God and also to seek out new ways of fulfilling their vocation to evangelise."*

I have highlighted four points in Article 2 of the Statutes that could help us to fulfil our apostolate better. In the context of these reflections, and with regard to the injunction to seek *new ways* of exercising our ministry, we should mention Pope John Paul II's call for a new evangelisation. He made this appeal in passing, and later repeated it as though the most profound statement he could have made was to say that evangelisation calls for new ardour, new methods and new ways of being expressed.

However, we are fortunate in having other things that can lead us to a renewal that will help us to truly evangelise the world in its different dimensions. The Superior General, for example, wrote, in an article on the new evangelisation: "The new evangelisation demands a new way of being a missionary. Your ministry will be characterised by building up community, by the active participation of all, by sharing out functions, by the resurgence of new ministries and charisms, by solidarity with the oppressed." In a footnote to that page, Fr. Maloney mentions that he took these ideas from Leonardo Boff's book, *Nova Evangelização: Perspectiva dos Oprimidos* (Fortaleza: Vozes, 1990), 122-126. He goes on to say: "In this interesting work, the author also mentions the new content of this new evangelisation: a new form of spirituality, the Church's new relationship with the world. As regards *method*, special emphasis is put on the role of the poor, as *agents* of evangelisation."

## Missions and Mission

We are the Congregation of the Mission, we are not a missionary congregation. What distinguishes us from others is not that in some countries we preach (or that we are still able to preach) missions, but that we have a *mission to be evangelisers*. Our mission is defined in Article 1 of the Constitutions. Article 14 of the Constitutions makes reference to **popular missions**: *"Popular missions, so dear to the heart*

of our Founder, are to be earnestly promoted. Therefore we should undertake the work of the missions according to circumstances of time and place, searching for all possible means to give this work new vitality, both to renew and build up a true Christian community and to awaken faith in the hearts of unbelievers."

There are many questions we should be asking ourselves with regard to popular missions. "What do we mean by 'popular missions'? What is their objective? What sort of missions do they include? What methods are used? How long do they last? What subjects do they deal with? Who gives these missions?"

Article 16 of the Constitutions has a reference to the missions "ad gentes": "Among the apostolic works of the Congregation, the foreign missions and missions to people in a similar stage of evangelisation, have an honoured place. In building up a new ecclesial community, missionaries should pay attention to the 'seeds of the Word' which may be found in the cultural and religious practices of the people" (cf., EN, 53).

We should be asking ourselves some similar questions about the missions "ad gentes." "Which countries would we describe as mission lands? How long do we continue to think of somewhere as a mission country? When does a country go back to being a mission country? Why was there such an outcry when Henri Godin and Yvan Daniel published the book: *France, a mission country?* (Lyons, Paris, 1943)? What does the term 'ad Gentes' mean today? Where are pagans to be found these days?"

And again, "what are the 'similar stages' referred to in article 16 of the Constitutions? Which of our provinces are in mission countries? Which of our missions could be classified as missions 'ad gentes'? Are Eritrea and Ethiopia in the category of missions 'ad gentes'?"

In the Apostolic Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II wrote about "new worlds," "new social phenomena" and "the cultural areas or modern areopagi" where we should be going to preach the Gospel (37-38). Where should the Church be going to preach the Gospel in our times? And what are the means we should be using?

With regard to what are known as popular missions, which are generally of short duration, we have the proposals that the Visitors suggested to the Superior General and his council, at the close of the Bogotá Meeting in 1983 (*Vincentiana*, 1983/2, 183-193). These indicate the basis of the mission, a description of a popular mission, its content, the organisation and dynamism of the mission, those who are to participate as missionaries, the formation of missionaries, and finally, they give an evaluation of these missions. Many of these proposals were taken up by Fr. Richard McCullen in his letter of 24 April 1983. He spoke first of all about the missionary vocation of the Congregation and then went on to examine the statistical data with regard to the apostolic works of the Congregation, before posing

many *questions* as to why there are so few missionaries and missions at present: he then described *some of the features of our missions and their content* (Vincentiana, 1983/2, 209-217).

The biggest problem for the Congregation at present is to know how many missionaries are working on the missions. According to the statistics I consulted, there are provinces in places like Madagascar, Mozambique and Congo which are, in essence, missionary countries, and yet there is no record of a single missionary working there. According to the 1997 statistics concerning ministries, out of the whole Congregation there were only 128 priests and one brother engaged in the work of giving popular missions. Out of a total number of 3,552 members in the Congregation, that would be the equivalent of 4%. If we add to this, 178 of the parishes that are classed as mission sectors, that would bring the total to 9.6%. In the parishes there are 883 priests, 1 permanent deacon and 19 brothers, a total that represents 28.5 of the Congregation's membership.

In fact, in order to provide information about the different areas of our apostolic activity, we would need to list members of the Congregation who give short missions, those who spend three or more years on the missions, on missions "ad gentes," those who work in parishes that are described as "mission areas" and those who, even though they work in parishes, colleges and seminaries, or are engaged in administration, nevertheless preach short missions during the holidays, in Holy Week, during the Christmas novena period, etc.

## Mission Parishes

The greatest number of confreres throughout the world and in nearly all the Congregation's provinces work in parishes. The subject of parishes should be studied alongside that of missions.

There are short popular missions that go on for a few days or several weeks. There are also longer missions that last for one, three or five years. The distinguishing feature of missions should be that they are transitory and that missionaries are sent there: once the mission is over we move on. But people often talk about mission parishes. This term does not simply apply to parishes in mission countries or provinces. It is particularly used to indicate the whole way of "running" a parish, that is to say, the way that the parish services are organised, the "choice" of people we will be working with and the pastoral methods to be used.

It is often said that parish ministry is not a Vincentian work. St. Vincent spoke out strongly against working in city parishes where there were plenty of priests and religious at a time when the poor country people had no religious support of any kind. But St. Vincent had no difficulty at all in speaking about the parishes that he had accepted and had sent his missionaries to work. We know that today

the outlying areas of many of our big cities correspond to "the country parts" in the time of St. Vincent. The important thing is that we should *work in parishes as Vincentians, we should make a parish Vincentian, that is to say, missionary*. Here, briefly, are some of the features that might characterise a mission parish:

- We make the effort to go out and look for the poor, without waiting in the church for people to come to us: we make the effort to seek out those who are most alienated from the Church, those who do not come to the parish, those who know nothing about the parish. In many provinces, the people who live in the suburbs have been displaced from the towns; they have moved from "the country" and, on leaving their familiar surroundings have been uprooted from their social, cultural, economic and religious milieu. In some countries, people move out of rural areas because they are afraid of guerrilla activity or because they are attracted by the big cities with their promise of paid employment and easy money.
- A mission parish helps all people who come to the churches and chapels and, at the same time, it devotes itself to forming new Christian communities in deprived districts, particularly the poorest places, and to seek out and train lay leaders who can exercise the ministries that are needed in the Christian communities.
- A special feature of mission parishes is the style and content of the preaching there: this is always a message of liberation, and as well as denouncing injustices, the preachers speak of God's plan that we, as communities, should bring to fruition in Jesus Christ, through his Spirit.
- In a mission parish, the sacraments celebrate the faith of the people and the commitments they make concerning the service of the poor, in the love of Jesus Christ.

These considerations, of course, go much further than the statements contained in the Statutes of the Congregation. This is what Article 10 § 1 has to say: *Parishes are included among the apostolic works of the Congregation, provided that the apostolate which the members exercise there is in accord with the purpose and nature of our Institute, and provided also that the small number of pastors requires it.* § 2 *These parishes of the Congregation should consist, for the most part, of the really poor, or should be attached to seminaries where confreres give pastoral formation.*

Some observations need to be made.

- There needs to be a revision of all the parishes of the Congregation.

- We always need to have contracts with the bishops so as to determine the missionary objectives of the Congregation's presence in such or such a place, and the date when our work in such parishes will come to an end. Without these elements it is practically impossible to make a real evaluation of the service and the work as a whole.
- We need to choose places that are priority areas for a Vincentian (preferably, places where nobody else wants to go) and we should be going to the most abandoned and alienated people.
- We need to be trained to work in parishes just as we used to be trained for teaching in seminaries.
- We need to join with the other members of the diocesan clergy in carrying out projects, in making evaluations, and in a truly integrated apostolate.

## **The Clergy, the Laity, the Daughters of Charity**

We often speak about formation of priests and helping the clergy. The distinction is a good and valid one because it frequently happens these days that for various reasons we are no longer called to work in seminaries and yet we can still help the clergy. These days there are very few seminaries run by the Congregation and these are only in a few countries: Colombia, Poland, the United States, etc. Up to the time of the Second Vatican Council there were many seminaries in Brazil (Rio de Janeiro Province), Ecuador, the United States, (Provinces of St. Louis, Philadelphia and Los Angeles), France, Italy, etc.

The General Assemblies of 1980, 1986 and 1992 had nothing very significant to say about ways of serving the clergy. In 1980, we just mentioned, as in Article 15: spiritual help for their ongoing formation, support for them in their pastoral zeal and giving them encouragement in their service of the poor. In 1986, the chapter on the evangelisation of the poor described the current situation and noted as a positive element "the renewed efforts, both in seminaries and outside of these, to continue giving effective help in the formation of the clergy, to be cordial towards them and give them fraternal guidance" (Lines of Action, n. 5). On the negative side, mention was made of "the lack of interest in creating new forms of helping the clergy" (*ibid.*, n. 6). In this section of the document we are presented with the following line of action in Article 11, 2°, "Depending on circumstances, the initial and ongoing formation of the clergy will be one of the chief concerns of the provinces. Over the next six years, the provinces will strive to find more up-to-date means of ensuring that the ministry to clergy, which St. Vincent considered to be 'almost equally' binding as the work of giving popular missions,



(CR XI, 12) will be given new vitality." At the General Assembly of 1992 very little was said on this point: "In the formation that we give to the clergy and the laity we will put special emphasis on dialogue and collaboration with the people of our time, in the light of the Church's social teaching, in order to foster, in a creative way, solidarity with the poor who are thirsting for liberation and happiness" (New Evangelisation, Commitment n. 3).

The final document of the 1998 General Assembly does not deal with the formation of diocesan clergy. In his presentation of the state of the Congregation, the Superior General said that in the previous six years we were doing more for the formation of diocesan clergy and that some of our missions had precisely this objective. The Congregation directs seminaries in Italy, Ireland, Poland, Mozambique, Australia, Brazil and, above all, in Colombia. We collaborate with others in the formation of diocesan clergy in the United States, Fiji, Nigeria, Poland, Belorussia, France, Mozambique, the Philippines and other countries. Some of our members teach in universities in the United States and Brazil where seminarists or diocesan priests are studying.

In the final document of this General Assembly, references to the formation of the clergy are to be found in the first commitment (to collaborate with the other members of the Vincentian Family), the second (to respond together to the cry of the poor), the fourth commitment (international missions) and the fifth (new means of communication) but the most important reference is in the third commitment (to collaborate in formation).

In the General Council's document, "The Visitors at the Service of the Mission," 25 January 1990, there were some questions that the confreres were asked to reflect on in community. Three of these questions concerned the formation of the clergy (*Vincentiana*, 1990/1, 31, questions f, g, h).

At the Bogota Meeting, convoked expressly to study the popular missions and the formation of the clergy and the laity, the Visitors made many practical suggestions about helping the clergy and the laity (*Vincentiana*, 1983/2, 189-193), some of which the Superior General used in his letter to the confreres (*ibid.*, 213-216).

On the question of working with the *Daughters of Charity*, Article 17 of the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission has this to say: "*Since the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity share the same heritage, members should willingly give them assistance when asked, especially in the matter of retreats and spiritual direction. They should also show a brotherly spirit of cooperation in those works which have been undertaken together.*"

It was the founders of the Company of the Daughters of Charity who insisted on this cooperation and help. So this has continued for



three and a half centuries and has obviously borne fruit. This collaboration has to continue.

A good number of missionaries have some apostolate connected with the Daughters of Charity: Provincial Directors whose time is almost completely given to this service; the missionaries who give annual or monthly retreats; those who in one way or another collaborate in the work of formation, in youth or vocations ministry: spiritual directors, chaplains, confessors, etc. It often happens that we are not able to respond to all their calls on us and all they would like us to do.

The Daughters of Charity continue to look on the missionaries as the most appropriate people to help them to fulfil their Vincentian vocation (cf., C. 2, 13; S. 23). In order to collaborate more effectively and respond to what they request and expect from the Congregation of the Mission, we need to know about their Vincentian spirituality and the Company's identity within the Church. We have to help them to live in dynamic fidelity this common inheritance, while respecting their own particular identity.

In their turn, the Daughters of Charity collaborate with the missionaries in apostolic and social works, in our parishes, on popular missions, in schools, dispensaries, and projects that promote women and children, etc.

The primary beneficiaries of this mutual collaboration will be the poor. It is they who constitute our common heritage.

# As Friends Who Love One Another Deeply

## Reflections on Community Living Yesterday and Today

*by Robert P. Maloney, C.M.*

*Superior General*

The two communities founded by St. Vincent have experienced enormous change since Vatican II. They have completely rewritten their constitutions and statutes, making their processes of decision-making much more participative. Nearly every province has engaged in a serious re-evaluation and restructuring of its works. Meanwhile, Vincentian studies have boomed. New translations of Vincent's and Louise's works have appeared in a variety of modern languages. New biographies of both have been written. A renewed interest in their spirituality has blossomed. Both Companies have produced new instructions on their vows. The virtues that Vincent proposed to both groups have been studied anew in depth. Both communities have organized numerous ongoing formation workshops and longer study programs, on provincial, interprovincial, and international levels.

Significant changes have also occurred in community living during this time. Life has become less formal, authority less imposing, scheduling less rigid. Many sense that relationships are much less stereotyped and much more personal. Still, even while acknowledging these very notable changes, a number of priests, brothers, and sisters express some uneasiness about community living. In this period of rapid transition, they ask, have we found the right formula for life together? Does community provide the faith-support, the encouragement, the understanding, the solidarity in action, the home that so many today — especially the young — seek?

Quite aware that I have no definitive answer to these questions, I offer this essay as a point of departure for further discussion of this important question. Using a methodology I have often employed, the essay will examine:

- I. Community Living in the Vincentian Tradition,
- II. Horizon Shifts Between the 17th and 20th Centuries,
- III. Community Living Today — some models,
- IV. Loving One Another Deeply.

## I. Community Living in the Vincentian Tradition

Vincent and Louise did not write about community living in a systematic way. An examination of the standard indices to their works yields meager results on this subject. But the rules of both Companies, in various chapters, touch on most of the key issues and problems involved in common life. Both founders, moreover, often treated life together in a wide variety of other contexts. Perhaps because the material in the sources is rather scattered, surprisingly little has been written over the years about community life in the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity.

As one examines what the founders hoped to create, several themes emerge:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is by no means to say that what has been written is without value. On the contrary, there have been a number of very informative essays on community living. Cf. A. DODIN, "El nacer de una familia vicenciana: Las Hijas de la Caridad," in *Lecciones sobre Vicencianismo*, CEME, Salamanca 1978, pp. 139-160; A. DODIN, "Evolución de la Vida comunitaria y sus exigencias," in *Vicente de Paúl, Inspirador de la Vida Comunitaria*, CEME, Salamanca 1975, pp. 13-35; A. DODIN, "La organización y el espíritu de la Vida Común según San Vicente de Paúl," in *ibidem*, pp. 139-160; J. CORERA, "Las Reglas o Constituciones de la C.M.," in *Vicente de Paúl, la Inspiración Permanente*, CEME, Salamanca 1982, pp. 187-216; R. CHALUMEAU, "La Vie Commune dans la Compagnie après Saint Vincent," in *Bulletin des Lazaristes de France*, N° 34, mai 1972, pp. 7-9; J. CORERA, "La Comunidad en las Reglas Comunes," in *Diez Estudios Vicencianos*, CEME, Salamanca 1983, pp. 89-106; J. CORERA, "Ideas de San Vicente de Paúl sobre la Autoridad," in *ibidem*, pp. 107-128; J. CORERA, "Bases Económicas de la Comunidad Vicenciana," in *ibidem*, pp. 129-157; J. CORERA, "Las Hijas de la Caridad no son Religiosas," in *ibidem*, pp. 158-184; J. CORERA, "Entregadas a Dios para los Pobres," in *ibidem*, pp. 185-199; M. LLORET, "La comunidad vicenciana, realidad viva de fe," in *Identidad Vicenciana en un mundo de increencia*, CEME, Salamanca 1990, pp. 161-180; J. MORIN, "Saint Vincent de Paul et la Communauté," in *Bulletin des Lazaristes de France*, N° 41, octobre 1973, pp. 46-65; P. PARDÍNAS, "De los Reglamentos a las Constituciones de las Hijas de la Caridad," in *Vicente de Paúl, la Inspiración Permanente*, op. cit., pp. 277-314; J. SUESCUN, "Vida Fraternal para la Misión," in *Don total para el Servicio*, CEME, Salamanca 1982, pp. 153-179; J. SUESCUN, "La Identidad de las Hijas de la Caridad y los dinanismos comunitarios," in *Identidad de las Hijas de la Caridad en las Constituciones y Estatutos de 1983*, CEME, Salamanca 1984, pp. 115-160; J. RYBOLT, "'As Good Friends' Reflections on the Development of the Concept of Fraternal Life in the Congregation of the Mission," in *Vincentiana XXXVII* (1993), pp. 475-488; M. PÉREZ FLORES, "Identidad de la Comunidad Vicenciana," in *Correo Vicentino Comunidad para la Misión*, Septiembre/Octubre 1997, pp. 13-18.

a) *a new form of life together, for a mission*

While it is clear that Vincent, in founding both Companies, envisioned a new form of community, what he created was by no means completely new. Rather, he gleaned from the Church's experience key elements that suited his purpose. As André Dodin noted,<sup>2</sup> Vincent profited from the richness that tradition offered him, fashioning a form of community that combined the stability of the monasteries, the prophetic ministry of the mendicants, and the active contemplation of the Jesuits. Both his Companies were to be apostolic societies. Both were to be communities *for* a mission: the Vincentians were to emphasize preaching the gospel to the poor, but were never to forget the active works of charity; the Daughters of Charity were to emphasize practical, everyday charity, but were never to forget the words of faith that would draw the hearts of the poor to God. The members of both were to be contemplatives in action and apostles in prayer. They were to engage in a prophetic ministry.

In the case of the Daughters of Charity, the new form of community Vincent set up was most striking. Vincent liberated into the world, almost for the first time in the Church's history, a large group of dedicated women not bound to the cloister but to God and the poor. The famous words he proclaimed on August 24, 1659, describe their call dramatically:

*They shall keep in mind that they are not in a religious order, since that state is not compatible with the duties of their vocation.*

*Nevertheless, because they are more exposed to the occasions of sin than religious bound to the cloister, having*

- for monastery only the houses of the sick and the place where the Superioress resides,*
- for cell a rented room,*
- for chapel the parish church,*
- for cloister the streets of the city,*
- for enclosure obedience, going only to the homes of the sick or places necessary for their service,*
- for grill the fear of God,*
- for veil holy modesty,*

*and making no other profession to ensure their vocation than,*

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. ANDRÉ DODIN, "La evolución de la vida comunitaria y sus exigencias," in *Vicente de Paúl, Inspirador de la vida comunitaria*, CEME, Salamanca 1975, pp. 15-35; "La organización y el espíritu de la vida común según san Vicente de Paúl," *ibidem*, pp. 141-160; cf., especialmente, pp. 145-150.

- *their constant trust in Divine Providence and*
- *the offering they make to God of all that they are and*
- *of their service in the person of the poor,*

*for all these reasons, they must have as much or more virtue than if they were professed in a religious order;*

*therefore, they will strive to conduct themselves in all those places with at least as much reserve, recollection and edification as true religious in their convent.*<sup>3</sup>

Vincent hoped for the best of both worlds. He strongly emphasized that the Vincentians and Daughters of Charity were not religious, but he wanted them to incorporate many elements of religious life into their own. In 1639 he wrote to Jane Frances de Chantal about the Congregation of the Mission:<sup>4</sup>

*And because you wish to know what constitutes our humble way of life, I shall tell you then, most worthy Mother... that most of us have made the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience and a fourth to devote ourselves all our life to the assistance of the poor common people... and that we practice poverty and obedience, and try, by God's mercy, to live in a religious manner, even though we are not religious.*

## **b) with deep theological roots**

As the theological grounding for life together, Vincent offered his Companies three principal sources:

1. *The Trinity.* He often spoke of the mystery of the Trinity to the Vincentians and Daughters. During a meeting of the General Council of the Daughters on June 19, 1647, he told them that they should “be the image of the Most Holy Trinity, so as to have but one heart and one spirit even though they are many persons.”<sup>5</sup> He reminded the members of the Congregation of the Mission that the bull establishing the Company binds them “to honor in a special way the Most Holy Trinity.”<sup>6</sup> In a conference given on May 23, 1659, he urged his confreres: “Let us be well-grounded in this spirit if we wish to have in ourselves the image of the adorable Trinity, if we wish to have a holy

<sup>3</sup> SV X, 661.

<sup>4</sup> SV I, 562-563.

<sup>5</sup> SV XIII, 633.

<sup>6</sup> CR X, 2.

relationship with the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit. What is it that produces unity and intimacy in God if not the equality and the distinctiveness of the three persons? And what produces their mutual love if not their perfect resemblance?"<sup>7</sup>

2. *The Mystical Body.* Vincent called the missionaries to be conscious that they are one body. As the parts of a body are bound tightly together, so also must union reign among the members of the Company.<sup>8</sup> In a conference about a paragraph in the Common Rules concerning charity,<sup>9</sup> he exclaimed: "What! To be a Christian and to see our brother afflicted without crying with him, without being sick with him! That is to be without charity. It is to be a mere caricature of a Christian, without humanity, worse than a brute beast!"<sup>10</sup> In the same paragraph of the Common Rules which he was commenting on, he offered a list of highly evangelical means for growing in the charity that would bind the members of the Company together as one body: 1. to try to treat others as we might reasonably expect to be treated by them; 2. to agree with others, and to accept everything in the Lord; 3. to put up with one another without grumbling; 4. to weep with those who weep; 5. to rejoice with those who rejoice; 6. to yield precedence to one another; 7. to be kind and helpful to one another in all sincerity; 8. finally, to be all things to all people so that we may win everyone for Christ.
3. *The imitation of the apostles and the first Christians.* Vincent often recalled the common life and the community of goods that flourished among the first Christians.<sup>11</sup> Less than a year before his death he encouraged the Vincentians to praise and thank God for having placed them in the state of his Son, the apostles and the first Christians who held all things in common.<sup>12</sup>

### c) *and institutional reinforcement*

On an institutional level, the common rules that Vincent composed for the priests and brothers used three mechanisms for creating tight cohesion in local communities: 1. the superior-subject relationship; 2. uniformity; 3. community of goods.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> SV XII, 256-257.

<sup>8</sup> SV XI, 120.

<sup>9</sup> CR II, 12.

<sup>10</sup> SV XII, 271.

<sup>11</sup> SV XI, 226; cf. CR VIII, 1.

<sup>12</sup> SV XII, 385; cf. CR III, 1, 3.

<sup>13</sup> For the treatment of the institutional aspects of community in the Common Rules, I am highly indebted to JAIME CORERA, "La Congregación de

1. Today, looking back, it is striking how important a role the local superior played in Vincent's time. In the rule for the Congregation of the Mission the superior-subject relationship appears in 63 out of 142 articles! The local superior intervenes directly in many aspects of daily life:<sup>14</sup> in assigning work,<sup>15</sup> in distributing economic goods,<sup>16</sup> in regulating matters concerning members' spiritual life and even their conscience.<sup>17</sup> But Vincent recognized that such interventions on the part of superiors would be effective only if accompanied by good human communication; otherwise, they could appear quite meddlesome. He tells the Council of the Daughters of Charity on June 20, 1647: "Oh my God! How necessary that is: great communication with one another. That embraces everything. There is nothing more necessary. That links hearts."<sup>18</sup>
2. A second institutional mechanism for creating cohesion within community was uniformity, which Vincent describes as "the safeguard of good order and of the holiness which comes from being together."<sup>19</sup> Vincent calls for uniformity in how the members dress, what they eat, and what they have in their rooms, as well as in the manner of directing, teaching, and preaching, and performing their own spiritual exercises. To a modern reader,<sup>20</sup> some of these regulations seem extremely detailed, and even rigid, since today we stress unity much more than uniformity.
3. A third institutional mechanism for creating cohesion was community of goods. "All our belongings are common property and are given out by the superior to individual members, such as food, clothes, books, furniture, and so on, according to the needs of each."<sup>21</sup> To safeguard community of goods, he determined that the superior would distribute to each confrere what he needs. Personal keys, to lock away one's own possessions, were forbidden.<sup>22</sup> In all this, Vincent clearly felt the influence of Acts' description of the ideal Christian community, which "was of one mind and one heart, and no one claimed that any of his

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la Misión: La comunidad en las Reglas Comunes," in *Diez Estudios Vicencianos*, CEME, Salamanca 1983, pp. 89-106.

<sup>14</sup> CR V, 11-14; VI, 4; VIII, 5; IX 5-7, 11-15.

<sup>15</sup> CR II, 10; V, 8-10; XI, 2-4, 8-11.

<sup>16</sup> CR III, 3-6, 9.

<sup>17</sup> CR II, 16-17; IV, 4; VIII, 8; X, 8, 11, 13, 15, 21; XII, 4, 9, 14.

<sup>18</sup> SV XIII, 641.

<sup>19</sup> CR II, 11.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. CR X, 6; VIII, 7-8.

<sup>21</sup> CR III, 3.

<sup>22</sup> CR III, 8.

possessions was his own, but they had everything in common.”<sup>23</sup> His description of the vow of poverty cites the example of this ideal community explicitly.

Even while noting the institutional mechanisms which Vincent used in the rules for solidifying community, it is important to recall the evangelical tone that he set, since it is the key to understanding his basic view of life together. He envisions a group of people living in community “as friends who love one another deeply.”<sup>24</sup>

## II. Horizon Shifts Between the 17th and 20th Centuries

On many other occasions I have written about the nature of horizon shifts and their importance. They profoundly influence the way we see life. The view of the world from the top of Mount Everest is remarkably different from the view on a subway platform deep underground in London. Whether we react favorably or unfavorably to a given horizon shift, it greatly affects us and how we see the world around us.<sup>25</sup> Such shifts usually take place gradually, even without our noticing that our way of looking at things is changing. Often, looking back over the years, we may find ourselves marveling at how our view of life has been altered. At times such changes in world-view take place in some persons, but not in others. But even for those whose outlook remains unchanged, horizon shifts have a significant impact since these persons live more and more in a world where those around them have come to see things from a perspective very different from theirs.

Three horizon shifts have had a great influence on the way we view community living.

### 1. *A shift from a monarchical model of authority to a participative one*

*Lumen Gentium*, *Perfectae Caritatis*, *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, *Evangelica Testificatio* and many other documents made this shift a part of official Church thinking.<sup>26</sup> The revised constitutions of most communities quickly followed suit.

<sup>23</sup> Acts 4:32; cf. Acts 2:42-45 and 5:1-11.

<sup>24</sup> CR VIII, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *The Way of Vincent de Paul*, New City Press, New York 1992, pp. 48-52 and 90-96; also, *He Hears the Cry of the Poor*, New City Press, New York 1995, pp. 60-63 and 83-85.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium* 18-28; *Perfectae Caritatis* 14; *Ecclesiae Sanctae* 18; *Evangelica Testificatio* 25.



This new paradigm brings with it new expectations: dialogue, questioning, shared decision-making, shared responsibility. It emphasizes that authority serves the community and seeks to empower the group and individuals with it.

But this shift in horizon has also at times brought with it crises related to authority in the Church as well as in civil society. Dissent from official Church teaching has become rather common; e.g., in regard to birth control and other aspects of sexual morality. Civil unrest has become the inevitable response to governments that deny people a voice in regard to decisions affecting their future, resulting, for example, in an amazingly rapid change in the political situation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, plus some openness and some renewed oppression in China.

Communities today are very conscious of biblical models of authority that emphasize its participative nature.<sup>27</sup> The servant model emphasizes that the leader comes from the community and exercises authority as one of its members, in order to unify it in pursuit of its goals. The servant-leader does not "lord it" over the members. Rather, he seeks to promote their gifts, animate their spiritual growth, and channel their energies toward their apostolic goals. The steward model affirms that the leader does not "possess" authority nor "own" the community's goods. Power, as well as responsibility for material things, are placed in his hands as a trust. He is responsible to God and to the community for using this trust well. The shepherd model emphasizes the leader's closeness to the group. He knows and loves its members, calling them by name. He cares deeply even for those who stray. He is willing to lay down his life for his friends.

## ***2. A transition from universally legislated structures to structures covenanted by local communities***

For centuries, the basic structures of community living were legislated for the whole congregation. Forty years ago, for example, whether a visitor went to Rome or to Rio he would find that, even though Vincentians spoke different languages in those places, the basic forms of community life were quite similar. The community rose at 5 a.m., went to morning prayer and meditated for an hour. Then the priests probably celebrated private Masses, ate breakfast, and left for their apostolate. At midday all joined in a particular examen, followed by lunch. In the evening before supper, they prayed Vespers and perhaps anticipated Matins. Later they recited a common night prayer, after which the grand silence began.

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<sup>27</sup> BERNARD LEE, "Community," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, edited by Michael Downey, Liturgical Press, Collegeville 1993, pp. 183-192.

Today, these and many other universally legislated structures have disappeared. Within the general framework of constitutions, statutes, and provincial norms, each local community is called to create the structures that will concretize the various values in its life: how will we carry out our specifically Vincentian mission in this house? how will we share daily life with one another? when and how will we pray together? how often will we meet for dialogue as part of our decision-making process? what meals and other "family" times will we commit ourselves to? In place of universally legislated structures, we are asked to forge *covenanted* structures. Questions like those above provide the framework for some of the decisions that form the covenant.

It is evident that covenanting, through local community plans, demands considerable creativity and responsibility from the members of the community. No longer do there exist detailed legislated structures that bind us from without; it is up to us to create structures that bind from within. Covenanting implies that, having created such structures, the community will abide by them. Fidelity to the covenant is crucial.

The Constitutions and Statutes propose the local community plan as the basic tool for covenanting. They list a number of items that should inevitably be included within the covenant,<sup>28</sup> as well as the need to evaluate it and revise it periodically.

Many local communities formulate covenants and live them out faithfully. Others, unfortunately, have less success, struggling with this new tool. Sometimes the covenant is little more than an order of day. Sometimes it is mainly the work of the local superior, with only perfunctory participation on the part of the confreres of the house. Sometimes it is copied year after year with little effort at evaluation and revision.

### 3. *A shift from an industrial to an information society*

Few things have influenced community living more profoundly. In more and more countries television and other means of communication are omnipresent. In many of our community houses

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<sup>28</sup> C 27: "Each community should work at developing a community plan, according to the Constitutions, Statutes, and the provincial norms. We should use this plan as a means of directing our life and work, of fulfilling the recommendations we receive, and of examining periodically our life and activities." S 16: "The community plan which each community draws up for itself as far as possible at the beginning of the work year, should include all of the following: apostolic activity, prayer, the use of goods, Christian witness where we work, ongoing formation, times for group reflection, necessary time for relaxation and study, and an order of day. All these should be revised periodically."

the TV looms large in the rec hall, riveting the attention of almost all. With increasing frequency, confreres have individual television sets in their rooms, but sometimes at the cost of their being sealed off from the rest of the community. Over the last decade, computers have also come to occupy an important place in our lives. They aid significantly in our apostolate but can also become a lure to isolation. In many houses the phone rings constantly. In some parts of the world portable phones accompany a number of confreres wherever they go. Confreres have answered portable phones even while conversing with me in my room at the General Curia or as I chatted with them at the dinner table during a visit in a province.

The rapid communication and interruptions of the "information society" contrast sharply with the atmosphere in community houses three or four decades ago, when silence, reading at table, and "early to bed, early to rise" were prominent factors in life.

In light of these horizon shifts, it may be useful to reflect anew on the three mechanisms St. Vincent used for creating tight cohesion in local communities.

- Certainly the superior-subject relationship has changed greatly over the last several decades. Actually, change in this relationship is not a new phenomenon. There have been various models of authority in the course of the history of the Church. The key issue, whatever may be the *modus agendi* in a particular era, is surrender to the mystery of God's presence as mediated through others. The Church as a whole, and each community within it, has decision-making processes that are ways of discerning what God is asking of us at a given time. Such processes have been remarkably varied over the centuries. Sometimes they are quite democratic, as in the election of the Pope or the selection of an abbot. Sometimes they have been quite monarchical, as when prince-bishops ruled over their local dioceses in the same way that they ruled over their kingdoms. Sometimes they have been broadly participative, but with the final decision resting in the hands of a single person. We use a much more dialogic model of authority today than in St. Vincent's time.
- The place of "uniformity" has changed significantly with the transition from universally legislated structures to structures covenanted by local communities. We speak much more today of "unity in diversity."<sup>29</sup> Communities manifest a growing consciousness that in all relationships one must have a profound respect for "the irreducible other." The persons in a group cannot be fused into a mass in which their individual identities are indistinguishable; nor must any individual seek to absorb or dominate the personality of another. As we commit ourselves to

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. C 22.

a common future in the Lord, the evangelical means suggested by St. Vincent in *CR II*, 12 (listed above) are essential. At the heart of these means is a genuine love for one's brother or sister in community "as for oneself." In other words, we recognize them as fully equal companions on the journey toward the Lord.

- St. Vincent's third mechanism for creating tight cohesion, "community of goods," remains very important, even as we view it from within the changed horizon of an information society. Material inequalities in community continue to create tensions. The problem arises somewhat painfully at times in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Confreres born in those countries sometimes observe that the missionaries who live and work side by side with them in community have far greater financial resources than they themselves do. This problem, which is not easily resolved, inevitably creates some distancing. Today, in addition to speaking about community of "goods" in a material sense, we emphasize the importance of other forms of communion: sharing our journey, our personal story, our spiritual and apostolic experiences.<sup>30</sup> Sharing information is also vital if all are to feel included in the life and decisions of the Congregation. E-mail, which is rapid and relatively inexpensive, is already playing a significant role in this regard.

### III. Community Living Today — some models

In almost all cases, we could surely not now return to the structures that gave shape to community living in an earlier era. Most of these served their purpose in their own time, but gradually became over-formalized, inflexible, and out-dated. Still, they often aimed at values that have abiding validity: unity with one another, common vision and energy in the apostolate, prayer, penance and conversion.

With the passing of former forms, we have not yet, in my judgment, come up with sufficient contemporary means for creating local communities that are fully alive and attractive to the young.

In a recent book<sup>31</sup> I treated at some length the various levels on which community is built, highlighting the need for common experience, common understanding, common judgment, and common action. I also described five key moments in community living: meals, prayer, fun, meetings, and apostolate.

<sup>30</sup> C 46.

<sup>31</sup> ROBERT P. MALONEY, *Seasons in Spirituality*, Hyde Park NY 1998, pp. 143-150. Cf. also, BERNARD LONERGAN, *A Third Collection*, Mahwah NJ 1985, pp. 5-6.

Given the complexity of human relationships, we should not be surprised that community is often imperfect. If community really is something we must work toward, then it can never be captured once for all. We must always be striving to create it. Sometimes there will be high points, sometimes lows. We will have better community in one house than in another, and, even within the same house, we will "jell" in some matters better than in others.

When one considers the great cultural differences and the variety of living situations in the worldwide Congregation, it is clear that no single model of community can be applied universally. Considerable variety is possible, and even necessary.

The local community plans mandated by our Constitutions and Statutes<sup>32</sup> allow for much diversity and creativity. In fact, many varied shades emerge as local communities seek to concretize the Constitutions and Statutes in daily life within different cultures. Below, I offer several models, recognizing that no one of them exists in pure form. Like the colors on the spectrum, they merge into one another. Many other possible models surely exist in between. In order to describe the models more concretely, I have given them the names used below, conscious of the limitations of such nomenclature. The communities mentioned are fictitious, though, as will be obvious to the reader, similar communities exist.

### 1. *A Modified Traditional Model*

St. John Gabriel's, like many provincial houses, is a large local community. In addition to the members of the provincial administration, many other confreres reside there, including a small mission team, 15 elderly priests and brothers who continue to serve generously according to their capacity, and eight sick members of the province who need ongoing care. The order of day in the house is a rather traditional one, adapted to the times. Morning prayer begins at 6:30, followed by a half hour of meditation in common and a concelebrated Eucharist. One confrere is assigned each week to animate morning and evening prayer; he selects hymns and various ways of praying the psalms, following the "General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours."<sup>33</sup> Another confrere animates the daily concelebrated Eucharist.

Breakfast is at 7:45. After that, most confreres scatter to perform their various duties.

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<sup>32</sup> C 27; S 16.

<sup>33</sup> "General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours", in *Documents on the Liturgy, 1963-1979, Conciliar, Papal, and Curial Texts*, Collegeville 1982, pp. 426, nos. 3431-3714.

At 12:30, lunch is served, preceded by examen. A period of about a half hour of common recreation follows lunch. Then some confreres rest; others engage in various apostolates.

At 6:40 in the evening, the community prays Vespers, followed by a brief examen. Most are there for supper at 7:00. The mission team, of course, is frequently on the road.

Once a month, the local superior organizes a house meeting, publishing an agenda the day before after having sought input from the confreres. During the meeting they discuss the principal matters affecting the life and apostolates of the house. Four times a year, on a Saturday morning, the confreres take part in a half-day of recollection. Annually, all engage in a five-day retreat, inviting a confrere of the province to come to the house to give it.

In a large house like St. John Gabriel's, the local superior must make many decisions. He does this with the aid of a small council, named by the Provincial.<sup>34</sup> He interviews each of the confreres of the house (a "communication") at least once a year.

Provincials have discovered that they need a rather good administrator to make this house run smoothly. Experience has taught that when things do not get done, the confreres get pretty upset. On the other hand, the confreres of the house have long experience of life together and have adjusted reasonably well to many changes over the years.

## 2. A "Bubbling-Up from the Bottom" Model

Eight confreres live in the local community at Frederick Ozanam High School, located in a very poor neighborhood. A single apostolate unifies their focus though, naturally, individuals engage in some other ministries as their time allows. Because all the confreres work in the school, they spend a great deal of time together. Fr. John, who is the school principal but not the local superior, holds a weekly meeting to discuss the main concerns of the apostolate. Besides the confreres, ten lay teachers take part in this meeting too. Fr. George, the superior, works closely with Fr. John. He is convinced that, if the local community is to be truly united, all must take responsibility for its life. He gathers everyone for a bi-weekly house meeting in which the major concerns (and some minor ones too!) are discussed and a decision is formulated. All the confreres, gathered at these meetings, constitute the "house council."<sup>35</sup> All feel free to contribute to the agenda, which George puts together and hands out the day before.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. C 134, § 2.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. S 79.

The confreres celebrate morning prayer together at 7:00, followed by mental prayer. One of them is responsible each day for preparing this time of prayer well, with music, symbols, variety in the method of praying the psalms, and a careful choice of readings, which are sometimes "Vincentian" ones. Twice a week during meditation, there is an opportunity for spontaneous faith-sharing.

After breakfast, all go to teach or carry out their administrative responsibilities in the school. Fr. John, at Fr. George's suggestion, has so arranged the schedule in the school that most confreres are free at noon to concelebrate the Eucharist. A number of students take part freely in this celebration, which is always well-prepared by a small liturgical team from the school.

Lunch is quick and informal, since everyone needs to be back in the classroom or in his office by 1:15 p.m. There is no cook at midday.

School ends at 3:20, but extra-curricular activities keep most of the confreres there until at least 5. At 6, they gather for Vespers, which they take turns preparing. A brief examen follows, with some variation in form, and then supper. Since lunch is so rapid and informal, the confreres, in their house plan, have agreed to try to be consistently present at supper. Since this is not always possible, they made a firm commitment to two "inviolable" evenings.

After supper, there are more school activities, but everyone gathers for a time of recreation together around 9:30 p.m. Once a week they view a movie on videocassette together, discussing it afterwards over some refreshments. One of the members of the community organizes this, sounding out the others on the choice of film.

The confreres make an annual retreat of five days together, usually going away to the local seminary or to a retreat house for it. Twice a semester they have a Saturday morning of recollection in which there is ample time for meditation and faith-sharing.

They have agreed that four times a year all of them will read and discuss the same book on a Thursday evening as an aid to their own ongoing formation. They select the book at a house meeting, obtain copies, and take turns organizing the discussion.

Fr. George meets with each confrere twice a year in an informal communication in order to see how each is doing.

### **3. *A Small Community Model***

Three confreres live at St. Justin's Parish. Since the Masses are at 8 and 9 in the morning and at 6 in the evening, they have agreed to join in Lauds and meditation at 7:00. On Monday mornings, at meditation, they read and meditate on the readings for the following Sunday. Then they share their reflections with each other. They find that this helps them begin preparation for the Sunday homily.



Each celebrates one of the parish Masses. Breakfast is very informal, since they are engaged early with the Masses and with the parishioners. Since each is free one day a week, according to the house plan, they often substitute for one another at the Masses.

They have lunch, which is their principal meal, together at 12:30. All three are almost always present. The mornings and afternoons are filled with a wide variety of activities: visiting parishioners, counseling, teaching occasional classes in the parish grammar school, joining with different prayer groups, organizing and accompanying parish associations that reach out to the poor.

The confreres try to eat their evening meal together around 7 p.m. It is somewhat quick and informal (there is no cook in the evening) since afterwards there are many parish meetings, and at times home visitation. All make the effort to be back by about 10 p.m. for a time of relaxation, usually with a snack. They pray night prayer together at 10:45.

Each of the confreres makes his annual retreat at a different time, usually with the members of other houses of the province or sometimes with the diocesan priests of the same city. They all also engage with other parish priests in some of the ongoing education programs that the diocese offers. In addition to that, they have agreed with the Franciscans in a neighboring parish to spend an evening together once a month in ongoing formation. On that occasion, they discuss a pastoral/theological theme, with someone preparing reading material ahead of time and organizing the discussion.

Fr. Jack is the local superior and pastor. Though this small community is often together, he arranges for a formal weekly meeting at which he and Frs. Jim and Fred discuss the main issues in their life and ministry and arrive at decisions.

#### **4. *A Dispersed Community Model***

The community of St. Francis Regis Clet is situated in an extensive mission area entrusted to the Congregation of the Mission. Eleven confreres make up the community but actually they reside in seven different villages. In four of the villages two confreres live together; in the other three a confrere is by himself. Some live fairly close to the central house, where the superior resides, but others are more than 50 kilometers away over rough, unpaved mountain roads that in the rainy season are hardly passable. In the local community plan they have made a firm commitment to come together every Monday. It is rare today that anyone misses. In the past, the tendency to overwork has kept some confreres away, but the community itself has been firm in insisting on fidelity to the common commitment to be present.



The order of day on Mondays varies somewhat, but in general the confreres pray together in the morning and share their faith with one another either after meditation or during the concelebrated Eucharist. Usually they then participate in a meeting whose focus is at times on apostolic planning, at times on ongoing education, at times on drawing up or evaluating the local community plan, at times on dealing with provincial matters, consultations, preparations for Assemblies, etc.

The confreres eat together at noon and spend the rest of the day relaxing and recreating with one another. They attest that, after a busy week, they look forward to the chance to rest and to enjoy each other's company. Their recreation varies. Sometimes a group engages in sports. Sometimes they watch a film. Sometimes they swim in the ocean, which is not far away. Some walk. Some play cards. Some experiment with computers.

Fr. Ed, the local superior, interviews each confrere four times a year, sometimes in the villages or sometimes at the central house. Since the confreres are so dispersed, he finds it important to sit down with them face to face rather often and to discuss what is transpiring in their life and work.

Once a year the confreres gather for five days to make their annual retreat together, inviting a confrere from outside the mission to give it. This retreat usually takes place in the mountains at the edge of the mission territory, where there is a Trappist monastery.

Though they live in various places, the confreres attempt to support one another in daily prayer. Recognizing the danger of isolation, they have worked out together a rhythm of prayer which all try to follow, whether living alone or with others, though naturally at times it must be adjusted to varying circumstances, like apostolic demands and Mass schedules. The confreres attest that, by and large, they are able to keep to this schedule which involves the praying of Lauds plus a half hour of mediation beginning at 6:30 in the morning and the praying of Vespers in the evening before supper, which they usually eat back at home in their villages. Much of the rest of the day is spent going to the various mission stations, celebrating Mass there, visiting the people, and training lay leaders. There are almost 300 villages in this extensive mission area.

Those are four models. I encourage the reader to create others. There are surely many possibilities.

## IV. Loving One Another Deeply

The challenge in every model is, of course, to be "friends who love one another deeply."<sup>36</sup> That is an essential part of the covenant we pledge to each other and to the Lord when we enter St. Vincent's community. Here I offer just a few suggestions in that regard. Much else could be written. In this article I am merely "staking out the territory." I encourage others to develop it.

It is a mistake to juxtapose community and mission. It is clear that in an apostolic society our holiness is intrinsically bound up with our apostolic mission. But it is clear too that our growth in God's life and in the mission we receive also flows from the bounds of deep charity forged with one another in community.

In recent years the centerpiece of the lovely tryptic painted by Kurt Welther for the Chapel of Mercy at St. Vincent's Parish in Graz has become very popular. We used it as the cover for the final document of the 39th General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission. It appeared on our web site all during the Assembly and also graced the front page of many of our Vincentian publications afterwards. In the painting, Vincent is sitting among the poor as one of them. A face, shining from the center of the table, reflects Christ's presence. The setting recalls to us the Last Supper, the sacramental meal of God's love for his people.

Does not this painting say to us something about community life too? In fact, must not we ourselves be gathered around the table in deep communion with the Lord and deep communion with one another, just as we hope to gather with the poor? In Mark's gospel, Jesus selects the twelve both "that they might be with him" and "that he might send them forth to preach" (Mk 3:14-15). In the long run, communion is the goal of Jesus' mission, and harmonious communities are a living sign that this mission is being fulfilled. For that reason *Vita Consecrata* states that the Church urgently needs closely knit communities "which, by their very existence, contribute to the new evangelization, in as much as they disclose in a concrete way the fruitfulness of the 'new commandment.'"<sup>37</sup>

In that light, I suggest that there are two complementary truths in regard to community and mission.

"Community is *for* the mission" emphasizes that our own Vincentian Community, like other apostolic societies, came into existence in order to serve a particular urgent missionary purpose. All our basic decisions must be made in light of that purpose. Moreover, the structures of community life should always preserve their flexibility so that we might be able to respond to the urgent

<sup>36</sup> CR VIII, 2.

<sup>37</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, 45.

needs of those we serve.<sup>38</sup> But our community structures should not be so flexible that they cave in. Our Vincentian goal of deep communion with the poor will be best realized when we live in deep communion with one another in the Lord.

"Community is an integral part of the mission" highlights that community is not just a means to an end: it is a value in itself. Community reflects and nourishes our social nature as human persons and, in the Christian context, is the place for the in-breaking of the Word of God. A particular community concretizes in place and time a particular way of being the Church. It is one of the many living cells that make up the larger Christian community. Of course, such particular communities must always work at strengthening their bonds with the larger community; otherwise, they run the risk of turning inward and becoming self-absorbed.<sup>39</sup>

In other words, like all true statements, the affirmation "community is *for* the mission" is part of a broader complex of truths. Only within that broader complex can it be adequately understood. It is surely true that St. Vincent founded the Congregation *for* the mission. But when this statement is overemphasized, we fall into the trap of using a work-model for understanding community. In that model, the local house readily degenerates into a hotel or becomes like a gas station where we fill-up for another day's journey or recharge our batteries for more work.

How can our communion with one another, or our living as "friends who love one another deeply," be fostered? To conclude this already long article, I suggest the following.

If a community is to be truly vital<sup>40</sup> then we must create:

1. a place of common experience, where all have shared in healthy initial formation, symbolic acts of initiation and incorporation, and well-structured ongoing formation;
2. a place of shared life, mutual concern, and forgiveness;

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<sup>38</sup> St. Vincent used to express this concept especially to the Daughters of Charity, by saying that we should be free to "leave God for God."

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *F.A.B.C. Papers*, # 83: "Communion and Solidarity: A New Way of Being Church in Asia, a Colloquium on the Church in Asia in the 21st Century," F.A.B.C., 16 Caine Road, Hong Kong. 7. *F.A.B.C. Papers* is a project of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences.

<sup>40</sup> One of the sociological reasons why people enter communities is the quest for the satisfaction of certain basic human needs that all persons have; e.g., sufficient life goods, personal identity, intimacy, solidarity and participation, generativity, achievement. Such needs cannot be fully satisfied by community life *alone*, but community should play a significant role in meeting them. For a very clear, interesting discussion of this question, cf. SANDRA SCHNEIDERS, *New Wineskins*, Paulist Press, New York 1986, pp. 255-263.

3. a place of shared goods, shared joys, shared sufferings, shared prayer, shared silence;
4. a place where the experience, the fruits, the hopes and fears of apostolic life are shared;
5. a place where we relax together, eat together, and enjoy one another's company;
6. a place of mutual help, both in the apostolate and in the many other daily matters that affect life together;
7. a place where we enjoy personal freedom and initiative, but at the same time are deeply committed to the common good of the confreres and our apostolic mission;
8. a place permeated by both affective and effective love for each other and for the Congregation as a whole;
9. a place where each of us can say with the Lord, as a Eucharistic community, "This is my body which is given up for you."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who experienced a martyr's death in a Nazi concentration camp at the very end of World War II, wrote this about community:

*Between the death of Christ and the Last Day it is only by a gracious anticipation of the last things that Christians are privileged to live in visible fellowship with other Christians. It is by the grace of God that a congregation is permitted to gather visibly in this world to share God's word and sacrament. Not all Christians receive this blessing. The imprisoned, the sick, the scattered lonely, the proclaimers of the gospel in heathen lands stand alone. They know that visible fellowship is a blessing. They remember, as the Psalmist did, how they went "with the multitude... to the house of God, singing with joy and praise" (Ps 42:4).<sup>41</sup>*

Today we speak of the need to "covenant," to "build community,"<sup>42</sup> to form "intentional" communities whose members say "yes" to the demands of membership while also helping formulate them. Building such a community requires time, energy, participation, and responsible carry-through. If in a previous era most community structures were legislated and the task was to fit into them, today we face the challenge of creating local community structures that will help us to live together "as friends who love one another deeply."

<sup>41</sup> DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, *Life Together*, SCM Press, London 1954, p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. a very interesting article by JOHN RYBOLT, "'As Good Friends' Reflections on the Development of the Concept of Fraternal Life in the Congregation of the Mission," in *Vincentiana* XXXVII (1993), pp. 475-488; esp. p. 481.

# Constitutions: Fount of the Missionary's Spiritual Life

A rereading 20 years later of Articles 28-50  
of the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission

by *Erminio Antonello, C.M.*

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The Constitutions establish the boundaries within which the Vincentian missionary is urged to live his spiritual life. In rereading them 20 years after they were written, one gets the impression of a painter who continues to retrace his brush strokes in order to refine the figure that he is painting. The painting sketched by the Constitutions is the *image of the Vincentian missionary*.

The continuing work of refinement is necessary from the material itself. The spiritual life, because it is "life," cannot be adequately confined inside of norms, because the protagonist that guides every spiritual life is the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that breathes where it wills and how it wills. Nonetheless the "norms" understood as the boundaries within which the life is lived, constitute the safety net that sustains it. In this sense the rereading of these norms from a distance of 20 years has, as its purpose, *bringing to the surface an even deeper spiritual sense*, so that looked at in their entirety the full meaning of the Constitutions may not be missed by a hasty reading.

If the constitutional principles cannot say it all, they can tell us much. In fact, if correctly understood, they fill two valuable functions. First, they point out the way in which the charism touches a specific person and leads one to the maturation of one's identity, to the end of preparing him for the mission towards which the vocation directs him. In that sense, the rule prevents personal freedom from drawing one away from the charism. Secondly, it tends to build up a uniform community. The rule, embraced in wisdom and in love, becomes the standard that sustains a community and maintains its fidelity to the charism.

## The Spiritual Orientation of the Missionary According to the Constitutions

The orientation at the heart of the Constitutions in the part that deals with the spiritual life of a missionary is guided by two coordinates: the consecration to Christ by the practice of the evangelical maxims (chapter 3, articles 28-39), and by a prayer life (chapter 4, articles 40-50). These two guidelines show up in the Constitutions as the capstones of the missionary's interior life.

Consecration and prayer, however, are not shown to be just any kind of spirituality, but are shown to be in concert with the vocation, and are understood to be *the very reason for the mission*. In fact the spiritual life of the missionary who is called to "*continue the mission of Christ*" in proclaiming and bearing witness to the gospel to the poor (C 28), is energized by the consciousness of "*missionary power*." From consciousness of the missionary vocation springs both the personal involvement in "the following of Christ," as well as a life of prayer.

From this aspect the practice of the evangelical counsels moulds the missionary into the humanity of Christ: a likeness which by itself can make him an authentic witness of Christ among the poor. But since "likeness" signifies the interiorization of the spiritual dynamics proper to the Master, it follows that power for the mission arises from an enduring and affective union with Christ, and hence a life reinforced by prayer. Just as prayer and unity with the Father formed the interior environment which generated Jesus' mission, the same would be true for the missionary:

*Christ the Lord — we read in the Constitutions — lived in an ongoing and intimate union with the Father, seeking his will in prayer. It was the supreme rule of his life, of his mission, and of his self-giving for the salvation of the world. We also, sanctified in Christ and sent into the world, strive to find through prayer, the signs of God's will, and how to imitate the availability of Christ, judging everything according to his spirit. "In this way our lives are changed by the Holy Spirit into a spiritual offering, and we become better disposed to participate in Christ's mission" (C 40).*

We could say that the logic behind the dictates of the constitutions in laying out the spiritual life of the missionary is summed up in the formula: "*To be of Christ in order to be like Christ*." This means that the missionary, in order to imitate Jesus the Missionary, must be in spiritual oneness with him.

## Consecration and Mission: Missionary Spirituality

In this sense, according to the Vincentian charism, *no more can consecration be separated from mission than there can be mission without consecration*. The consecration-mission connection is not simply imposed one on the other, nor is it a simple coupling one with the other. It is the very act of belonging to Christ which places the Vincentian in the missionary state. In the same way in which Christ, sent by the Father, was also consecrated by the Father and did nothing on his own *"but only what he saw his Father doing"* (Jn 5:19; 1 Tm 6:16). So the Vincentian missionary derives his strength from an ever-deepening union with Christ.

In fact, since there cannot be mission without an enabling bond with Christ through whom he is proclaimed, the mission in our charism includes the consecration to Christ as its proper foundation. Consecration and mission are not joined in a merely extrinsic way. The reason rests in the fact that one cannot proclaim Christ if he is not a part of Christ. So we avoid a possible estrangement between consecration and mission, as well as the risk of the subordination of one to the other.

In this regard one must be more careful in the use of language. Saying that "consecration is a function of mission," seems to subordinate consecration to mission, reducing it to the level of means, instead of recognizing it as an integrating part of the whole. Likewise placing subordination on the level of foundation results in an imprecise and defective meaning, and is in practice harmful and misleading.

The correlation between consecration and mission assumes a particular importance at the present time in which people no longer embrace Christianity by way of tradition, or by a theoretical explanation of its content. Tradition, at most, develops devotion.

Theory alone is not convincing. What still can have the power of persuasion today is evangelization, is witness. The "old and new" thought of St. Vincent shows itself with renewed vigor, according to which the efficacy of evangelization springs from an intimate, stable union with Jesus Christ, that is, from holiness.

*"Neither philosophy, nor theology, nor discourses" — he writes to the young superior Antoine Durand — "succeed in working in souls. It is necessary that Jesus Christ be incorporated in us, and we in him; that we act in him and he in us; that we speak as he does and in his spirit, as he lived in union with his Father, and proclaimed the teaching which he received from him.... It is necessary, then, that you empty yourself in order to put on Jesus Christ. You know that ordinary causes produce effects according to their proper nature: a sheep generates a sheep, and likewise a man another man, and so on. In the*



same way, if one who guides others, forms them, speaks to them, is animated by only a human spirit, those who see him, hear him and seek to imitate him, will become utterly human. In whatever he says or does he will inspire in them only the appearance of virtue and not the essence.... For, like a wild growing plant, onto which is grafted a good branch... so we, miserable creatures that we are, made of flesh, grass and thorns, if Our Lord impresses his character on us, giving us, so to speak, the seed of his spirit and of his grace, and united to him like shoots on a vine, we can do what he himself did on this earth. I wish to state that we, filled with this spirit, can perform divine acts and generate, as St. Paul says, new children for our Lord" (COSTE, SV XI, 343-344).

To undertake a relationship with the humanity of Christ, indeed the personal road to sanctity in St. Vincent's thought, is the high road of evangelization. In the person of the missionary, transformed by oneness with Christ, the poor can meet the mercy of Christ. Assimilation to Christ is the vital principle which, interiorized by the grace of the Holy Spirit, makes effective his acts of evangelization (C 28, CR II, 18).

Truth is affirmed in practice. What, in fact, does a poor person understand? He understands a humane, merciful and charitable stance in his behalf. And when this attitude does not come from just human compassion, but is nurtured by the living gospel, the poor person is then touched by the saving act, which is seen in the good attitude of the one who reaches out to him. *"There can be no mission, without human involvement."* Hence arises the urgent need for a missionary's spiritual life: the life that is in intimate union with Christ, effectively encountered and critically embraced in the patient continuous work of a spiritual journey without pause, which has as its base the spirit of prayer:

*"An important matter, to which you must apply yourself carefully, is an intimate union with our Lord in prayer; this is the reservoir from which to draw the knowledge necessary for the new office assigned to you" — writes St. Vincent in the same letter to Antoine Durand — "Have recourse to God in prayer to preserve your soul in the fear of God and in his love, so that — woe is me, I must tell you this and you must know it — that in trying to save others, some end up losing themselves"* (COSTE, SV XI, 334-345).

Consecration to Christ in the missionary tension, animated by prayer, constitutes thereby the characteristic element of the missionary's spiritual life.



## In the Evangelical Counsels, the Predisposition of Missionary Proclamation

The first characteristic element of the missionary's spiritual life, is consecration through the evangelical counsels. But what is their function in the structure of the life of the missionary? According to St. Vincent's basic thinking, the evangelical counsels are to mould the missionary's humanness according to the logic of the gospels. More than to "religious profession," in so far as it seeks perfection in itself according to the spiritual and religious culture of the time, St. Vincent looked at the "manner of renunciation" professed with religious vows aimed at freeing the missionary *"to bring the mission to reality and to labor for the conversion of souls"* (COSTE, SV XII, 370). He therefore, in keeping with his practical bent, aimed for the substance of things: *"It is not enough to be in a state of perfection and then not incline oneself to the work of attaining it"* (COSTE, SV XII, 371). He wanted to escape formalism, holding to the "interior form" of religious life. Rather than the "exterior form." For this purpose according to his vision, consecration to the mission by way of the evangelical counsels is intended to lead to a life lived in the *"following of Christ"* sought by renouncing all that *"controls the world: the desire for material possessions, for building, for pleasures, for being esteemed in order to be able to say: 'It is I who have this and that, who enjoy such a pleasure, who hold such an office'"* (COSTE, SV XII, 370).

Making this thought relevant to ourselves, we can say that the evangelical counsels have the function of moving the missionary out of self-love in order to spur him on into a union outside of the self, into a relationship with Another.

In his consecration the missionary says: Another deserves my consideration; in this Other I place my trust, this Other becomes the "norm" of my existence; that is why I follow him in the same condition that he chose for himself, in order to give witness to the transcendence of the Kingdom and its mysterious saving presence in this world.

The evangelical counsels express a substantial affinity with Christ. They look to him; they bear witness to him. Without him they would be unattainable. The anthropological result of this connection is that, living in union with him, the consciousness of self as communion, or rather the experience of self in relation to the other grows. Consequently, experiencing the evangelical counsels tends to introduce in the missionary *"the principle of communion"* as the norm for existence. From this renewed consciousness there also arises the missionary's manner of acting, which makes place for that other, who in the first place is the Other par excellence: Christ, the Samaritan, the stranger, then the other who is "sacrament," the brother and the poor.

The experience of the love of charity drawn and learned from nearness to Christ and followed in the evangelical counsels is at the heart of the missionary's spirituality. The practice of the evangelical counsels lived in the Vincentian way lead the missionary to a detachment from self, so that he can be a clear vessel of the presence of Christ among the poor.

### **A Missionary Who in Virginity Witnesses to the Sovereignty of Christ**

The humanness of the missionary, flowing out from the experience of Christ, because of a virginal life, undergoes an opening of the heart embracing everyone and everything in his availability to all, and his free giving of himself to all in love.

Virginity is correctly defined in the Constitutions as a "gift." It is truly a grace; an intuition and an impulse from the Spirit which fulfills a person in the direction away from the biological need for sexual expression. It then brings about human fulfillment because of the gratuity of the gift of self (C 30).

*Imitating Christ in his limitless love for all, we embrace, by vow, perfect chastity in the form of celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. We accept it as a gift given us by the personal and infinite goodness of God. In this way we open our hearts more widely to God and neighbor, and our whole way of acting becomes a joyous expression of love between Christ and the Church which will be fully manifested in the age to come (C 29).*

The transcendental beauty which consecrated virginity introduces into the world is the absolutely freely given overture to another. It is something split off from the Trinitarian world stored within our fragile humanity; it shows therefore that overture to the human proper to the Trinity which is pleased to undertake a loving relationship with its creature, bringing into our human world the reciprocal love given absolutely gratuitously which constitutes the Trinitarian substance. In a world dominated by utility and efficiency, virginity shows the fruitfulness of virginal love, which in its apparent pointlessness is evidence to the love of charity. The virginity of the consecrated person is a gift for all: it is a reminder of the shallowness of life driven by the obsessiveness of egoism that lowers one to an object of one's own pleasure, or an instrument dominated by self. Virginity introduces a new way of looking at reality, because it dismisses the illusion that man can build himself up by dominating someone else. The strength of virginal celibacy for us missionaries rests in the fact that it refines our sensibility, opening it up to the poor in that tenderness that fosters closeness and respect.

The Constitutional dictate then touches on the tools necessary to bring about the virginal gift in one's existence by these four points:

*Intimate union with Christ, true fraternal communion, zeal in the apostolate, and asceticism supported by the experience of the Church, will enable our chastity to grow strong (C 30).*

The state of virginity constitutes for the missionary a witness to himself first of all, because it takes him back continually to the fundamental love of existence. It constitutes the unceasing return to the source of one's being, because without the Lord as his companion existentially active in one's being, virginity could not be lived as an integrating element in human life. Virginity, even though nourishing itself by the asceticism which protects, is never a flight from the world. It can become so however, and when it does become so, it becomes resignation or a poorly performed duty. It also begets a sourness that alienates people. For this reason virginity is protected by fraternal communion. When fraternity is fully lived, then virginity brings to the world the radical diversity of the gospel, adding to its beauty. Even a world of poverty and suffering, enlightened by virginal tenderness, becomes humanly more beautiful.

### **A Missionary Who in Poverty Shares His Goods in Fraternal Living**

The characteristic element of a missionary's poverty rests on sincere dependence and submission to the law of love, knowing what to renounce, what to keep for oneself, and how to share. Consecrated poverty does not nourish itself on poverty for its own sake. Missionaries by their activity work to relieve the misery of the poor. Jesus vigorously applied himself to overcoming poverty by his evangelization. He lived after the manner of a poor person, even though he was not poor, having lived by means of dignified labor. Poverty then, is not good in itself. It can become so in the measure in which the affection of the heart pushes and converges towards the true good. In the same way the possession of goods is not evil in itself, but can become so if one becomes led by greed, by the desire for more and more, making an idol of material possessions. The missionary's poverty stands opposed to "*that cupidity for wealth, which is ruining almost the whole world*" (CR III, 1).

So the missionaries in their following of Christ through poverty must keep themselves in front of the goods of life respecting their value: material goods are for life; life is not goods. Yes, they do possess goods, but the possession is ordered to that communion which is maintained by fraternity and thus the worth of those goods rests in their being an instrument for nourishing fraternal life.

*Each member ... is bound by the universal law of work. The income from each one's work ... will become community property, ... so that after the example of the first Christians we may live with a true community of goods and may help each other fraternally (C 32); whatever is needed for the support and growth of members and for carrying out work, should come principally from the joint effort of all (C 33).*

To effect communion through poverty means walking a narrow path leading to "a style of life that reflects simplicity and moderation," so that "whatever we use for the apostolate ... should not be ostentatious" (C 33). The law that directs our goods for the community, does not have to do only with individuals, but also with the community as a whole: there is a community poverty, which "avoiding any accumulation of goods, should try to share its resources with the poor" (C 33).

The arrangement of goods in communion contrasts with egoism and therefore is protected and safe guarded through education. Dependence on the superior's permission is a means of education through a constant verification of one's attitude to poverty. In the logic of the Constitutions, "permission" is not a simple authorization to administer one's goods, but a true act of communion which we exercise as a form of self-review through dialogue with the superior about the possession and use of goods: "... his (the superior's) consent is scarcely enough ... each member must weigh what is suitable and comfortable to our life and ministry, according to the spirit of our Founder..." (C 34).

The spiritual good that the missionary is to gain through poverty depends on experiencing a detachment of the heart, which predisposes one to "depend entirely upon God, and [his] evangelization of the poor will become more effective" (C 31).

### **A Missionary Who in Obedience Seeks the Will of God**

The path of detachment from self reaches its summit in the submission of one's will to the designs of God in one's own life. If one can easily agree with this in theoretical terms, it is more difficult to in the concrete, when one is asked to submit his will to the mediation of another. It is said that obedience to a superior is never submission as such, but expresses the giving over of self to God, and this is how the spirituality of obedience derives its energy. It is also said that the superior's command does not necessarily coincide with God's will since it is a mere moment in time. Nonetheless it is certain that submission to the superior always places one within God's will, and it is precisely this that, according to Vincentian spirituality, must be central in the missionary's life.

The Constitutions say that obedience is *"to participate in this mystery of the obedient Christ"* (C 37). Jesus by obeying the Father and then Mary and Joseph introduced into history the intimate mystery of God, the substance of which is the communion of love. Obedience is therefore rooted in the logic of communion. For this reason it can be rightly observed that obedience comes to fruition in a climate of *"seek[ing], as a community, the will of the Father ... through mutual sharing of experience, open and responsible dialogue in which differences of age and outlook interact..."* (C 37, § 1). Responsible obedience is realized by walking a road that prepares for the decisional act which, however, properly rests on the responsibility of the one in authority.

The act of obedience then, is considered to be a process that is not arrived at by a decision from on high, but one that matures through dialogue and community participation. From a spiritual standpoint, Christian obedience at its base, is an act of mutual charity through which the community lives and frees itself for its mission. Without charity it would be difficult both to command and to obey. But above all the mission dynamic would lose all its force, since the missionary proclamation could not exist if there would be no mandate, and thus without an obedience carried out *"promptly, joyfully, and perseveringly"* (C 37, § 2). If obedience would be limited to a mechanical act without the involvement of the heart, it would not be an act of love, and thus neither a fully human act, much less missionary. The missionary aspect of obedience is overlooked in this part of the constitutions, but is a fundamental point, which should be rethought.

This being said, the exercise of obedience depends on the commands of the superior which can be realized only as a virtue accepted in faith: *"They [the confreres] should try by the light of faith to obey decisions of superiors even when they consider their own views better."*

Practicing the counsel of obedience tends to animate the missionary's spirit in two ways. The first is that it leads him to form his spirit by seeking the will of God in his own life. The second on the other hand, leads him to locate himself within the missionary communion of the company, as opposed to individuality of thought and action. In other words, obedience leads the missionary to understand his existence as determined by his relationship with the Other: in that expropriation, which hurts self-love and egoism, but which educates to conceiving oneself in the logic of dialogue, of participation and of missionary charity, but which leads him to understand himself within the logic of dialogue to be a participant in missionary charity.

Obedience then is not reduced to mechanically creating "consensus" but is rather a spiritual act, situating one within the community by evangelical and missionary boundaries, guiding one's actions by fidelity to the love by which God guides history. The vow

of obedience is then amplified in the "*special vow of stability*" (C 39), which tends to nullify the inconstancy of one's freedom, anchoring it in the fidelity of the Company in its mission.

**"Give me a man of prayer and he will be ready for anything" (SV XI, 83)**

The Other to whom the missionary wishes to liken himself through the evangelical counsels, is not an abstract principle, but a living countenance with whom he dialogues in that most intimate act which is prayer. Prayer, according to the plan of the Constitutions, and according to the mind of St. Vincent, is the hinge on which the missionary's life rests, and on which he keeps finding the basic vitality of the mission.

*"According to the mind of St. Vincent, prayer is the living source of the spiritual life of a missionary; through it he puts on Christ, becomes steeped in the teachings of the gospel, discerns things and events as before God, and remains always in God's love and mercy. In this way the Spirit of Christ will always make our words and actions effective" (C 41).*

The dictates of the Constitutions present prayer in a harmonious way under three aspects: *a)* As nourishment for the interior life of the missionary structured on the "model" of Christ; *b)* As the factor building up his community life; *c)* As a unifying and life-giving element of his missionary activity. These three aspects, however, are shown to be intrinsically bound together, since the text is intent on showing the intimate connection that: "*When we pray, faith, fraternal love, and apostolic zeal are constantly renewed; and in action, the love of God and neighbor is effectively manifested*" (C 42).

In the first place, prayer is the missionary's spiritual food as it was for Christ: "*Christ, the Lord, remaining always in intimate union with the Father, used to seek his will in prayer. That will was the sole aim of his life, mission...*" (C 40). Through prayer the missionary's freedom enters a fruitful dialogue with the Lord, recognizing him as an inseparable partner in his own existence and activity. The schizophrenia between faith and activity is the worst ailment for a missionary, because it splits apart that interior unity which is the power behind the witness. Prayer as the memory of Christ is the way in which the spiritual unifies all that could become disconnected by activity. And so prayer is the interior healing for the dissipation of the spirit, because it continually mends the fragmentariness of existence, joins it to the Eternal, and heals its wounds.

The interior climate of this reconciling prayer which is proper to the missionary operates within the framework of the spirituality of the "poor in spirit." It is a prayer which must nourish itself by the spirit of poverty. "*The prayer of a missionary should be characterized by*



a filial spirit, humility, confidence in providence, and love of the goodness of God" (C 43). Thus the interior climate of prayer must be fueled by the desire, by the expectation, by the asking, and finally by the recognition of the Lord's presence, which burns away the evil which accumulates in the depths of the heart.

In the second place, a heart purified and enlightened by prayer, opens wide the way to fraternal unity. Personal and community prayer build up the community and "*fraternal love is renewed*" (C 42). Liturgical prayer in particular, and especially the Eucharist, is the "*source ... of our ... activity and fraternal communion*" (C 45, § 1). By praying together the missionaries by "*one hour daily in person prayer*" (C 47), the "*celebrat[ion of] the word of God*" and the "*shar[ing] with one another the fruit of [our] spiritual and apostolic experience*" possess "*an excellent way of animating and renewing [our] lives*" (C 46). Fidelity to genuine prayer slowly transforms one's self-knowledge, helping to elevate itself to a gratifying relationship with the Other, with the mystery, with Christ and by consequence, with the brothers. Prayer consequently frees one from being closed up within the self, which is a barrier to fraternal life.

Finally the missionary's prayer is closely bound up with his missionary activity. Prayer and activity are the same act for the evangelizer, since mission and prayer must sustain each other in turn if both are to be authentic. Evangelization without piety is more like a propaganda campaign. Piety without mission degenerates into sterile devotionism. For this reason the Constitutions rightly underscore that the missionary must make his mission a prayer through the formula used today, but which in the original formula of 1980 it was stated: "*The missionary becomes a contemplative in action and an apostle through prayer*" (C 42). A similar fruitful correlation of mission and prayer, according to the Constitutions, is not only a principle, but also a way of life:

*We should find a unique experience of prayer in the ministry of the word, of the sacraments, and of charity, and in the events of life. Likewise, in evangelizing the poor, we should find Christ and contemplate him in them. Finally, in exercising pastoral care for the people to whom we are sent, we ought to pray not only for them but also with them, sharing spontaneously, as it were, in their faith and devotion (C 44).*

The missionary's prayer must thus be woven into his ministry, and the assimilation of this principle makes right the whole spiritual system characteristic of the Vincentian missionary.

Everything within him: the spirit of vocation, the practice of the evangelical counsels, personal and community prayer, all must come together to transform his personality in order to be "in" Christ, so he can be like him "for" his poorest brothers.

## The Spiritual Life of the Missionary is a Life "Humanized" by the Gospel

The expression "spiritual life" used up to now, because it is used freely and easily, can have its true meaning lost in so much verbiage. When "spiritual life" is taken for granted, the mission soon suffers, because the proclamation of Christ to the poor without a true spiritual life is hampered by personal feelings, or by some type of religious ideology. The mission comes to life not by the power of an idea, nor of a value, nor of a duty. The mission comes to life only by a lived experience. For this reason it can be stated that "the mission" as such does not exist, but "the person is a missionary or is not one." For the poor there can be no liberation if they do not encounter men liberated by the Gospel.

It is the encounter with people who are overcome by the wondrous presence of Christ who continue to live in that consciousness, and are thereby able to cast out a net of persuasive proclamation. It would be simply ridiculous to relegate to the impersonal internet the idea of Christian proclamation: and it is that by the fact that Christ is an event of life and not a promotional message. It is a means of empowerment, so that the living missionary spirit results in the betterment of the person. Only the one who experiences his own humanity lived in Christ is instinctively a missionary. This becomes assured by a humble and generous following, and by a prayer life which realizes one's attachment to Christ.

All this does not move along a smooth road, as is sometimes written. The following of Christ bears with it practical problems because of the tension involved. A missionary who aims to be faithful to his vocation of making Christ present by means of his own words and actions cannot help but undergo certain difficulties in his relationship to Christ; not in the sense of an emotional uncertainty, but in the sense of grasping the immediacy of the Lord to one's heart — the relation that is, without residue, of him to the very demand of true humanity — is certainly not a tranquillizer. The relationship of truth to Christ is always disquieting because it moves in opposite directions from the world's logic.

It is precisely this juxtaposition that St. Vincent takes care to point out in the Rules as the premise to every spiritual journey:

*Let each of us accept the truth of the following statement and try to make it our most fundamental principle: Christ's teaching will never let us down, while worldly wisdom always will. Christ himself said this sort of wisdom was like a house with nothing but sand as its foundation, while his own was like a building with solid rock as its foundation. And that is why the Congregation should always try to follow the teaching of Christ himself and never that of the worldly-wise (CR II, 1).*



This observation is undeniable. It sketches the picture of a man transformed by the Gospel. It is the humanness of the missionary who is transformed evangelically, to become the source of the missionary meeting with his poorest brothers. It reveals itself as a new reality which amazes and draws into a human relationship the poor who have need of humanity.

(STEPHEN J. INDIA, C.M., translator)

# The Constitutions: Unity in the Diversity of the Congregation of the Mission

*by J. Ignacio Fernández de Mendoza, C.M.*

*Vicar General*

The editorial council of *Vincentiana* decided to dedicate an issue of the magazine to the new Constitutions of the Congregation. The present Constitutions, as Fr. Richard McCullen declared in his introductory letter to them, are the result of "seventeen years of study, reflection, prayer and the deliberations of three General Assemblies." The General Assembly of 1980 formulated the definitive text which, after submission to the Holy See for approbation and slight modification in some places, was approved by a decree dated June 29, 1984. The Superior General at that time, Fr. Richard McCullen, promulgated them three months later on September 27, 1984. From that moment on the present Constitutions have markedly affected the life of the Congregation. For three decades they have been, and we hope they will continue to be in this new century, an unambiguous point of reference for the missionaries of the C.M.

The present constitutions were written with three fundamental criteria in mind: fidelity to Vatican Council II, to the Vincentian sources and to the signs of the times. For a little less than twenty years all the provinces and local communities have been accommodating their norms and life to the new Constitutions. Furthermore, the Congregation passes into the new millennium, guided by new Constitutions in which we find a valid design for the identity of the Congregation in the present moment.

## The Unity of the Congregation of the Mission

The present Constitutions have placed in the hands of the provinces, and thus of the respective Visitors who animate them, a series of attributions greater in number and specific weight than those which Visitors possessed in former times. An eminent missionary, knowledgeable about the history of the C.M. and its successive organizational changes, affirmed during the eighties with a certain

sense of humor that the C.M. had become a federation of independent provinces. This appreciation contained various ingredients: a description of the reality as the aforementioned missionary interpreted it and a certain dosage of fear in the face of the possible tendency towards dispersion.

It is evident that the C.M. has given itself Constitutions that decentralize to no small degree its own organization. The attributions of peripheral entities have been broadened significantly in the new Constitutions. In this area the Congregation has done no more than follow the lead of certain ecclesial guidelines laid down by Vatican II and present day theological and pastoral thinking. There can be no doubt that pendulum swings between the center and the periphery affect the Church as such and, consequently, the Congregation as well. But, given this, it must be affirmed from the outset that fears of excessive dispersion and, in the worst case, disintegration, lack any solid base. The text of the Constitutions in themselves gives no validity to this fear, nor does the actual practice of the provinces as witnessed by their actions since the new Constitutions have become law. The understanding the missionaries have of the Congregation as such, the sense of a unified body and its juridical foundations, shared by almost all the members of the Congregation, cover all areas of life in the Congregation. I invite the reader to examine the Constitutions with me in order to take a closer look at some, though not all, of the fundamental characteristics that refer to the unity of the Congregation taken as a whole.

## Unity Around the Founder of the Mission

The first sign of unity can be found in the constant referral in the Constitutions to the founder of the Mission. There is frequent allusion to St. Vincent, a mixture of respect, admiration and marked affection. The Constitutions call for fidelity to the Founder (C 1), to the spiritual patrimony received from him (C 3, § 1), and to the design of the particular spirituality put into effect by the saint (C 5). The Constitutions insist upon St. Vincent's vision of apostolic life (C 10), community life (C 19), his missionary understanding of the evangelical counsels and the vows (C 28), prayer life (C 41), and, above all, the Vincentian charism shared by those of us who make up the Congregation today.

The affinity of the provinces, local communities and individual confreres with our Holy Founder gives a profound sense of unity to the Congregation that today is found in numerous cultures and countries of the world. If, for example, someone were to ask any missionary to define himself personally, our imaginary missionary would doubtlessly present himself as a Vincentian. And if, for example, our curious questioner, following up his inquiries, were to

ask what the word Vincentian means, then our missionary no doubt would resort to a simple presentation of the person of St. Vincent. The Founder of the Mission unifies in his own person all the missionaries of the Congregation. The Constitutions begin by presenting the particular end of the Congregation that cannot be achieved until all the members of the Congregation and the communities are faithful to St. Vincent. The end of the Congregation which consists in following Jesus Christ, Evangelizer of the Poor, and which was pointed out by St. Vincent from the very beginning gives to the missionaries of the Little Company a true and authentic sense of a united family.

In summary, the constant recourse in the Constitutions to St. Vincent and to the particular end of the Congregation helps to recreate the unity of the missionaries of the Congregation in the following of its founder. His charism, invoked continually in the text of the Constitutions and shared by the members of the Congregation affords greater solidity to the Little Company than any other theological, spiritual or juridical element.

## Shared Spirituality Nourishes Unity

The Constitutions bring together with a certain conciseness and not a little breadth the keys of Vincentian spirituality, a spirituality that is centered in the following of Jesus Christ in the style and manner of St. Vincent. The Constitutions begin their first page with the enunciation of a basic principle that is central to Vincentian spirituality: the end of the Congregation consists in following Jesus Christ, evangelizer of the poor. How does one achieve such an end? The text of the Constitutions offers us a series of closely linked answers that refer to certain key nuclei of Vincentian spirituality.

The missionary must put on the spirit of Jesus Christ (C 1, 1°), that is, he must incarnate in his own life the great evangelical values, especially those which are closely related to the particular end of the Congregation. Everything in the spiritual life of the missionary is centered on the end of the Congregation. Relying on the impulse of God's grace, the missionary will try to be filled with the sensitivity and attitudes of Christ (C 4); he will try to participate in the Spirit of Christ just as St. Vincent proposes (C 5); he will try to fill himself with the intimate personal attitudes of Christ in relation to the Father, to the poor and to the providence of God (C 6). Missionaries will cultivate with particular esteem the five characteristic virtues (C 7) which occupy a privileged place in the spirituality of the Congregation.

Continuing this series of brief declarations, the Constitutions go on to indicate another key to the particular spirituality of the Congregation. The Congregation feels called by God to evangelize

(C 10). The announcing of Jesus Christ expresses the nature of the Congregation — an announcing saturated with the love and compassion of Christ for the poor (C 11). The evangelical counsels, for their part, taken on by all missionaries in imitation of Christ and for the sake of the evangelization of the poor (C 28-39), give to missionaries a particular quality of spiritual life which is identical everywhere, thus contributing in no small measure to the consolidation of the unity of the Congregation. The Constitutions must necessarily contain a reference to a key element of Christian and Vincentian spirituality: prayer. This is a basic source in the life of the Vincentian missionary.

In summary, Vincentian spirituality, hinted at in the Constitutions and made flesh in the life of the missionaries, is a decisive factor favoring the unity of the Congregation. If, for example, a missionary leaves his own house and moves to another in the farthest reaches of the world, in a short time he would feel identified with the confreres he finds there because all would live and act in accordance with Vincentian spirituality.

## Participation Favors Unity

The Constitutions and Statutes affect all the missionaries of the Congregation. Frequently we find in the texts of the Constitutions expressions like these: "all," "each and every," "we," "the missionaries," "the Congregation," "the Provinces," and a series of verbs in the plural to indicate in that way that all the members of the Congregation, with no exception, can and should feel involved and committed in the different expressions of the life of the Congregation.

The present Constitutions have opened channels along which the participation of the missionaries flows. Consultation, provided for on many occasions and at varying levels, makes possible and calls for participation. The same may be said of the recourse to election in different cases as the Constitutions, Statutes and Provincial Norms provide. At the present time, missionaries collaborate in a significant way at the moment of drawing up the different community and provincial projects and the pastoral plans in their different ministries. On the other hand the Superior General and the provincials frequently name commissions for particular purposes. Normally these commissions open a process of consultation in order to gather the opinions of the missionaries and, given this, proceed to the formulation of a document or the carrying out of an apostolic work. Many missionaries also participate in workshops, taking into account their different works: missions, teaching, parish work, etc. Domestic, provincial and general assemblies are based upon the open participation of all the missionaries and communities. The meetings of local superiors at the provincial level, and the Visitors' meetings in

the different geographic areas, or at the level of the whole Congregation offer another platform for participation

Throughout the Constitutions certain concepts referring to the participation of the missionaries are highly significant. In regard to obedience it says the whole community should search out the will of God in a shared effort (C 37). The word "co-responsibility," a very symbolic expression, appears for the first time in the Constitutions to show that in the Little Company responsibilities are shared. One must not wait for others to make decisions, but rather, on many occasions, the active participation of everyone is called for. Another passage of the Constitutions tells us it is the right and duty of everyone to collaborate in the apostolic life and government of the Congregation (C 96).

In reference to the possessions of the Congregation, the Constitutions call for the responsibility of all at the moment of acquiring, administering or determining the use of the temporal goods of the house and the province (C 149). Another channel for participation concerns the information offered to the missionaries about economic affairs at the different levels: general, provincial and house (S 103, 1).

In summary, today participation is a real possibility, a right and a duty. The text of the Constitutions calls for participation to a greater degree and with greater insistence than in past times. Participation of itself can spark the interest of the missionaries in regard to everything that has to do with the life of the Congregation; it increases unity and strengthens the sense of belonging. On the other hand, taking shortcuts in the participative process engenders a lack of interest and inhibition. In these cases the unity is more apparent than real. The present Constitutions, attentive to the ecclesiology of communion and the ethical-social value of participation, so highly regarded in advanced societies today, have opened up areas of co-responsibility for the missionaries in everything concerning the life of the Congregation.

## Vincentian Formation Strengthens Unity

The purpose of formation is to prepare missionaries to carry out with competence the mission of the Congregation (C 77, 1; S 40). This means, of course, an integral formation: human, spiritual, intellectual, pastoral and specifically Vincentian. With regard to the philosophical-theological formation of aspirants to the C.M., we adhere to the laws of the church (C 78, 3; S 45, 2). On the other hand, Vincentian formation for all missionaries, younger and adult candidates, is carried out by the Congregation. The present Constitutions lay down fundamental guidelines for the Internal Seminary (C 82-86), the Major Seminary (C 87-90), the formation of Brothers (C 91-92) and ongoing formation (C 81). In line with the

principles inserted in the Constitutions, two documents that appeared later on have had positive effects on the formation of our candidates: the *Ratio Formationis for the Internal Seminary* (1982) and the *Ratio Formationis Vincentianae for the Major Seminaries of the Congregation* (1988). Thanks to the Constitutions and these two documents, today the Vincentian formation of all our candidates is virtually identical in all the provinces of the Congregation. Because of this we can safely say that with regard to Vincentian formation the unity of the Congregation has been strengthened.

Bear in mind as well that present day Vincentian formation has received a strong stimulus, coming in good measure from the numerous and frequently high quality publications, as well as from the frequent study weeks and congresses. From the time of the approbation of the Constitutions a whole series of means has helped to foment the unity of the Congregation in the minds of the missionaries. Today the seminarians, students and missionaries of the C.M. all speak the same language because of Vincentian formation that is everywhere alike. It has come to us through the Internal Seminary, through the basic course of studies, and later on through ongoing formation.

### **Interprovincial Collaboration Fosters the Unity of the Congregation**

Collaboration and mutual assistance are a sign of the unity of the Congregation. Of themselves they express and at the same time fortify the already existing unity. The Constitutions and Statutes in many places call for interprovincial collaboration in the area of economic aid (C 152), personnel (S 3), the missions "ad gentes" (S 5, 1-3), pastoral strategies (S 8), Internal Seminary (S 45, 1-2) and mutual contacts between the candidates of the different provinces (S 47).

In the present decade interprovincial collaboration has received a strong stimulus in response to the call from the General Assemblies of 1992 and 1998. In accord with the conclusions of both Assemblies new channels were opened and interprovincial collaboration is taking place as a matter of course. This has been consolidated in the areas of the missions "ad gentes" and of formation in both the Internal and Major Seminaries. The number of interprovincial novitiates grows daily, as does the movement of formators from one province to another. Another area of collaboration is the growing participation of missionaries from different places in interprovincial organisms, created for the purpose of mutual aid: in missions, in formation and in spiritual attention to the Daughters of Charity.

National and continental Visitors' conferences meet regularly. The provinces that are economically able come to the aid of more



needy provinces. Another method of interprovincial collaboration has also begun by means of twinning arrangements between two provinces. Pastoral services with and for the Daughters of Charity and Vincentian lay groups in many areas are giving birth to close collaboration among missionaries from different provinces.

In short, the method of interchanging interprovincial information in use up to now using newsletters and other publications will increase because of the ease which modern means of communication offer; namely, e-mail and the Internet.

Collaboration is a manifestation of charity and makes clear the unity of the C.M. which, over and above cultural differences and the uniqueness of each province, is one body. In speaking of this topic, two extremes must be avoided. It is just as bad for missionaries to close themselves off in the small world of their own province as to try to make of all the provinces a shapeless mixture. Missionaries need their own house which welcomes them, their own province, but without succumbing to the danger of isolation. The collaboration, the interchanges and the interprovincial assistance provided for by the Constitutions and the General Assemblies, invigorate the unity in diversity of the C.M.

## **The Superior General, Center of Unity and Coordination of the Provinces (C 102)**

The Constitutions and Statutes have drawn up with precision the mission and areas of competence of the Superior General, at the service of the Congregation. With clear allusion to our Founder and the subsequent historical succession, they identify the Superior General as the "successor" and "continuer" of the mission of St. Vincent (C 101). "Together with the whole Congregation" he shall do everything possible so that "the charism of St. Vincent will always stay alive in the Church" (C 101). Therefore the Superior General has the primary responsibility for the conservation, development and adaptation of the Vincentian charism in the circumstances of a changing world.

Immediately afterwards the Constitutions describe the Superior General as the "center of unity and coordination of the provinces" (C 102). They also ask him to be the "source of spiritual animation and apostolic activity" (C 102). Let these citations serve to remind us of some basic points about the ministry of the Superior General.

At the beginning of the third millennium, the missionaries can be found in the service of the poor and engaged in various activities in more than seventy countries. This multiplicity of situations requires a visible center of unity who, according to the Constitutions, can be none other than the Superior General.



Afterwards the Constitutions and Statutes complete the previous affirmations with a new attribute: the Superior General "governs all the provinces, houses and individual members of the Congregation with ordinary power according to the norm of universal law and of our own law" (C 103). This is one more service the Congregation expects to receive from the successor of St. Vincent. His authority to govern everything at the service of the Congregation is explicitly recognized. Where a difficulty might arise is not in the recognition of his authority, but rather in its restrictions and in the way of exercising it, since the provincials also have attributes in the governance of their respective provinces.

The principles of government provided by the Constitutions for all who exercise governing functions affect the Superior General as well as all missionaries in positions of authority. They are to exercise that authority having ever "before their eyes the example of the Good Shepherd who came not to be ministered to but to minister" (C 97,1), and remaining open to "dialogue with the members" (C 97,2). The purpose of this dialogue is to discern the will of God, reach mature decisions and fruitfully serve the missionaries of the Congregation.

In the Constitutions, articles 107 and 124, as in the Statutes, articles 51 and 91, are found the principal faculties of the Superior General, and even the manner in which he should exercise them in the service of the Congregation. In practice, the Superior General exercises the ministry outlined for him in the Constitutions in two complementary ways. In the first place, it is by spiritual and Vincentian animation, promoting its own charism and trying to increase the missionary spirit of the C.M. The Superior General's other works is administrative: appointments, permissions, and approval of Provincial Norms. To carry out his office the Superior General uses ordinary means: councils, written documentation and visits to the provinces.

The Superior General counts on the affection, respect and veneration of the missionaries of the C.M. In his person and what he represents the provinces and houses of the C.M., spread throughout many countries of the world, are held together. The Superior General is also recognized as the real and visible symbol of the unity and universality of the Congregation. The Constitutional texts which refer to the Superior General as the center of unity do nothing more than put in written form a reality widely felt and recognized by the members of the C.M.

The unity of the Congregation is a gift from God. The task of all confreres is to preserve and increase it. One enemy of this unity is the preference given by superiors, whether Superior General or provincial, to particular groups. The law of the gospel recognizes only one preferential option, the one that draws us to the poor, whether they be within or outside of the C.M. The poor are always first.

## Unity in Diversity

The present Constitutions were drawn up in the light of Vatican II. In a moment in which new winds were blowing and a reaction against uniformist and centralizing tendencies was in the air, certain values considered novel at that time enjoyed the unconditional support of the majority of the confreres: participation, co-responsibility, decentralization, dialogue and subsidiarity. In light of this, the normative legislation of the C.M. gathers together these aspirations and gives them written form in the Constitutions and Statutes.

More than a few passages in the Constitutions, Statutes and the approved documents of the last three General Assemblies place in the hands of the provinces and local communities a considerable number of faculties. The C.M. has conferred upon itself a somewhat decentralized organization in which, without lessening the attributes of the Superior General over the entire Congregation, the provinces have ample room for maneuvering. For the sake of brevity, we shall limit ourselves to recalling a few articles in the Constitutions and Statutes that lay down guidelines favoring the decentralization and autonomy of the provinces and houses. In the Constitutions see the following passages: Article 13 on the forms of the apostolate; Article 23 about the due autonomy of the local community; Article 27 which speaks of the local community project; Article 37 which calls for a spirit of co-responsibility; Article 83, 2 about the time for the Internal Seminary; Article 124, requiring the appointment or confirmation of the Visitor; Article 126 in which the province decides whether or not to have an assistant provincial; Article 130, 2 on the naming of the local superior; Article 143 on the Provincial Assembly; Article 146 which determines who participates in the Provincial Assembly; and Article 150 on the ownership of material goods.

Article 98 speaks of the principle of subsidiarity in support of decentralization: "All members, in accepting assignments given to them by the community, have the authority necessary to carry them out. For this reason, those matters which can be managed by individual members or lower levels of government should not be referred to higher levels of government." This principle favors the autonomy of the provinces and houses. On the other hand, subsidiarity by itself does not place in doubt the unity of government or allow for individualism.

The Statutes repeatedly refer to the attributes which favor the autonomy of the provinces. Let us recall some passages: Article 9 refers to the approbation of norms governing social action; Article 17 speaks of the practical norms on poverty; Articles 22, 2 and 23 which allow the provinces to decide on some aspects about Good Purposes; Article 26, 4 on the suffrages for the deceased; Articles 41-42 on formation; Article 43 on the location of the internal seminary; Article 69, 2-3 on the way of electing the Visitor; Article 74, 2 protecting the right of the province to propose its own method of

naming provincial consultors; Article 91 which deals with the value of the norms emanating from the Provincial Assembly; Article 97 which refers to the participants in the Provincial Assembly.

Article 125 of the Constitutions and Article 69 of the Statutes bring together the principal attributes of the Visitor with regard to the governance of the province. In truth, these are many and of greater weight than those possessed by the Visitor in times past in the Congregation.

## Conclusion

From what has been said it can be seen that the Constitutions protect the unity of the C.M. We have alluded to the factors that protect: the end of the Congregation, indicated by our Founder, which holds together the missionaries; Vincentian spirituality shared by all the members of the Congregation; the participation of the missionaries in the life of the C.M.; specifically Vincentian formation, interprovincial collaboration and assistance and, finally, the figure of the Superior General as center of unity of the C.M.

But it is also true the C.M. has given itself a more decentralized organization than in past times. The art of governing will consist in combining the responsibilities of the Superior General over the whole Congregation with the attributes of the Visitors, provided for in the Constitutions, with regard to their own provinces. It will also be a question of harmonizing the interventions of the Superior General with the plans of the provinces. The organization of the Congregation, at once unified and also decentralized and diversified, just as the Constitutions confirm, should be considered most adequate for the C.M. at the present time.

During the General Assembly of 1992 there were several voices in favor of granting greater power to the Superior General. Behind these were a concern and a desire to introduce small changes in the fundamental law of the C.M. for the sake of greater missionary efficacy. That General Assembly did not judge it opportune to introduce any change in the Constitutions. Nevertheless, it approved the following postulate: "The Superior General at a time and in a way he deems most fitting should promote a study in order to determine exactly his own power and that of the Visitors to foster solidarity in missionary ministers" (Decree 1, AG/92). In fact, as a consequence of this decree, the Superior General approved a document\* in which, without lessening the Constitutional and Statutory attributes of the

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\* "The Powers of the Superior General and of the Visitors in Relation to Missionary Commitments." Cf. *Vincentiana* 190, No. 6 (November-December 1993), pp. 536-540 (text only in Spanish).

Visitors, reformulated the breadth of his own powers to call on the provinces to participate in particular interprovincial missionary projects.

Bearing in mind the globalization prevailing today and, especially, the needs of the missions "ad gentes," it should be considered opportune that the Superior General give a greater stimulus to interprovincial collaboration with a view to the mission of the C.M.

The vitality of the Congregation will depend, among other things, on unity in diversity. The unity, which is a good in itself, should not weaken the diversity or the degree of autonomy that the Constitutions grant to the provinces. These, for their part, should not shut themselves off, going so far, in the worst case, as to break in practice their relation with the rest of the C.M. which is one body. Openness to new horizons and breathing missionary air enrich the life of the provinces. On the other hand, shortsightedness impedes the flow of stimuli and breath each province can and should receive from the C.M.

The unity in diversity of the C.M. works itself out within prescribed limits. Both values, unity and diversity, remain firm if they find support in a structure that protects them. This structure is the Constitutions and Statutes. Of course, times change and the practical interpretation of the texts depends in large measure on individuals and even groups. Therefore, it would be prudent to remain on guard in order to defend the unity of the C.M., and at the same time the areas of autonomy provided by the present Constitutions. It would also be wise to be alert so as to impede any step backwards to centralization and uniformity. However, it should be considered normal to have a policy of keeping the doors open to possible new interpretations, as seems most advantageous at a given moment, that facilitate the harmony between the unity and the diversity of the C.M., between the coordination of the apostolic life of the whole Congregation and respect for the autonomy of the provinces, between the central government of the C.M. and the provincial government.

(JOSEPH V. CUMMINS, C.M., translator)

# The Government of the Congregation according to the New Constitutions

*by Yves Danjou, C.M.*

*Province of Paris*

Government is an important part of the particular law of the Congregation of the Mission. It (the Congregation) is the image of the Church whose hierarchical structures are well known. But it has the obligation to be particularly well organised because of its status as a Society of Apostolic Life where the emphasis is placed on the apostolate set in place by its superiors and maintained by community life.

## **The First Rules of the Congregation**

Let us quickly recall that the present organisation of the Congregation is rooted in its history. St. Vincent was conscious, from the beginning, that he was setting up an association of missionaries which was to last. The contract of foundation of the Congregation of the Mission, established on 17 April 1625, is explicit: "That, following the death of the said M. de Paul, in order to continue the said work, to the greater glory of God and the edification and salvation of the neighbour, those who have been admitted to the said work and have persevered in it until that time will elect, by the majority of votes, from amongst themselves, one whom they deem fit to be their superior."<sup>1</sup> The bull of erection, "Salvatoris Nostri," promulgated by Urban VII on 12 January 1633, takes up the same themes while clarifying the powers of the Superior General a little more.<sup>2</sup>

St. Vincent was conscious of the importance of setting up the organisation of the Congregation well. Towards 1635, at a time when a severe illness puts his life in danger, he questions himself about what he might regret most; "Asking myself about what might distress

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<sup>1</sup> COSTE, XIII, 199-200.

<sup>2</sup> COSTE, XIII, 201-202.

me somewhat, I found that there was nothing, save that we have not yet set down our rules."<sup>3</sup> He undertook, from that moment on, to set down a rule by asking advice from those around him and by taking inspiration from the practices already in place in the communities.

In 1642, the favourable time seemed to have come. The King had just accepted the bull "Salvatoris Nostri." One year previously, the Archbishop of Paris had approved the use of vows in the Congregation of the Mission. St. Vincent, therefore, convoked the first General Assembly which opened at St. Lazare on 13 October 1642.<sup>4</sup> Consisting of 12 members, this Assembly took time to consider the rules relating to the Superior General and his succession. It was foreseen that he would be aided in his office by two Assistants, that he could intervene, either himself or through the offices of others, in all the important affairs of the Company and that the Assembly would be convoked every three years. In addition, the houses were divided into four provinces.

### Affirming the Practices

The first Assembly is important for the government of the Congregation because it 'consecrated' the supreme authority of the General Assembly, its duty to meet according to arranged times and its right to elect the Superior General who has as his mission to unite and organise the Congregation. These points will be filled out or clarified in what follows but, even up to the present, they constitute the basic elements of our administration.

St. Vincent knew that this assembly would be determinate for the future of the Company. He proposes his resignation as Superior General out of humility, certainly, but also to ensure the good running and the future of the institution he had established. At the insistence of his confreres, he agrees to keep on in the office "protesting that this was the first act of obedience that he believed he had offered to the Company."<sup>5</sup> After this Assembly, he undertook to make known what had been decided. On 11 December 1644, he wrote to the Superior at Rome, Jean Dehorgny: "Our task is to have our common rules approved here; those concerning the General, the election and the Visitors. If we are to reach the conclusion of this undertaking, in nomine Domine, you must see what you can do to this end."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> LOUIS ABELLY, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God, Vincent de Paul, founder and first Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission*, Paris 1664, book 1, ch. LI, p. 252.

<sup>4</sup> COSTE, XIII, 287-298.

<sup>5</sup> COSTE, XIII, 296.

<sup>6</sup> COSTE, II, 488.

Certain practices had taken root as time went by. St. Vincent occupied himself in strengthening these. The community at St. Meen received an official visit from Antoine Portail who, moreover, gave it a positive report. Despite this, the superior, Jean Bourdet, did not hide his disagreement with the practice itself. St. Vincent replied to him on 22 July 1646, showing him the importance of such an undertaking. He set out for him eleven reasons for preserving this practice which remains current practice in the Congregation.

### Codifying the Rules

Thus, the rules of government were clarified little by little. In 1651, a new Assembly, which consisted of 14 members, took place at St. Lazare. It was concerned primarily with the final redaction of the Common Rules and confirmed what had been said on the subject of the election of the Superior General. In 1658, St. Vincent was happy to present to his Community "The Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission." This text, which is a rule of life, is not specific about the organisation of the Congregation. We know, however, by what is known as the *Codex Sarzana*,<sup>7</sup> that there existed a collection of texts which regulated the government of the Company.

In spite of all of this, it took several years before there was a well-established text recognised by the highest authorities of the Church. René Alméras, from the time of his election as Superior General after the death of St. Vincent, undertook to codify the regulations relative to the administration of the Congregation. These, after several amendments, were approved by the General Assembly of 1668 and ratified by the Archbishop of Paris.

The most important rules were gathered together to be submitted for the examination and approval of the Holy See. The "Constitutiones Selectae" which resulted from this were approved by Pope Clement X in the brief "Ex Injuncta Nobis" of 2 June 1670. They would be finally completed by the decisions of several different General Assemblies. The private edition of them, made in 1847 under the title *Collectio Bullarum, Constitutionum ac Decretorum quae Congregationis Administrationem spectant*, would serve as the principal reference until the promulgation of the Constitutions of 1954.

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<sup>7</sup> This text is a first version of our Common Rules followed by commentaries relevant to the various offices. It was discovered by Angelo Coppo at Sarzana (Italy). The critical text has been presented by John Rybolt in *Vincentiana* 4-5 (1991), pp. 307-406.



## The Constitutions of 1954

It must be acknowledged: "The Constitutions and Rules of the Congregation of the Mission," promulgated on 25 January 1954, do not constitute anything really new. Their principal concern was to gather together in a clear fashion the principal rules which govern the Congregation, having been set in conformity with the Code of Canon Law of 1917. The rumour even ran that these Constitutions had been imposed by the Holy See. The Superior General, Fr. William Slattery, had to explain this in the circular of 1 January 1954: "There is nothing (in them) which alters the spirit of the Company. The spirit of St. Vincent is found absolutely intact therein. The greater part of the changes concern the administration of the Company.... As for the modifications made to the Common Rules, they are very small in number." And he concludes: "It is clear that no change has been made to the essentials."

That is correct, in particular with regard to the government of the Congregation. The underlying theme which one detects comes less from the rules themselves than from the spirit which had governed their elaboration and presentation. Our identity is drawn from it. The more or less explicit reference is to the consecrated life while St. Vincent had done everything to distinguish us from religious. He had declared once again before his death: "I tell you that this is not a religious (order) and that we are not religious."<sup>8</sup>

Even the division of the chapters is revealing of an understanding of the Congregation which was based more on hierarchical structures than on missionary activity. The tone is set from the beginning since the second chapter sets out the order of precedence amongst the members of the Congregation. From that, it moves to its government and the people who constitute it, vows and ministries coming long after that. Considerations of power and organisation occupy almost half the document. Interpersonal relationships within the community are touched on only once and then only to highlight the dangers (# 223).

## The New Constitutions

The Constitutions of 1984 follow a different model. The organisation of the Congregation is dealt with in the third and last part. It is thus at the service of apostolic activity with the goal of realising the end of the Congregation and of supporting the life of its members. It is, at the same time, infused with the theology of Vatican II, attentive about situating the members of the Church in relation to the mystery of God. The Council, in the constitution

<sup>8</sup> COSTE, XII, 373.



*Lumen Gentium*, by defining the Church as the People of God and presenting this notion before that of its hierarchy, wishes to show that all its members are equal "with regard to their dignity and common activity in building up the body of Christ" (# 32). Such an affirmation looks not only to the deepest nature of the Church but also to its way of being and acting.

We see this same attitude in our Constitutions. These present the government of the Congregation from the starting point of the ideas of collaboration, participation, cooperation, responsibility and communion, principles which define the place and work of each member in the community. Since all the confreres have the responsibility of participating "to fulfil their common mission" (# 19), it follows that they also have the possibility of participating in its elaboration and organisation.

"All members, since they have been called to labor for the continuation of the mission of Christ, have the right and responsibility, according to the norms of our own law, of working together for the good of the apostolic community and of participating in its government" (# 96). From the beginning of the section which deals with the government of the Congregation, the general principle is set down, having both a theological and pastoral foundation since all the baptised are called to participate in and to continue the work of Christ. The Constitutions call the confreres not only to work for the "good of the apostolic community" but also to collaborate, that is to say, to act in accord with the members of the community and, ordinarily, to work with them. To that end, they must be able to participate in its government, having the right to discuss and intervene in the elaboration and realisation of its undertakings.

The consequences are set out as follows: "Members should cooperate actively and responsibly in accepting assignments, undertaking apostolic projects, and carrying out commands" (continuation of # 96). We cannot forget that responsibility has a moral value. It is the expression of a free being who, with full understanding, is involved in what he undertakes. The responsible man has clear understanding of what he proposes to do. He accepts it consciously and becomes involved in the action which he has decided on.

### Co-responsibility

We find these different demands in the Constitutions. Dialogue at the heart of the community (# 37, § 1), between confreres (# 24, § 2) and with the superior (# 97, § 2), allow for a mature reflection on apostolic action, considering all its aspects and appreciating its value. It is not simply a matter of "gaining the floor," which is limited to making one's voice heard in a discussion. The confrere must enter fully into the decision which is adopted by all, that is to say, "being

responsible for undertaking apostolic projects." St. Vincent, in the Common Rules, insists that obedience is more than a simple acquiescence to a decision and must involve a commitment to support it (V, 2).

Finally, true responsibility demands a personal involvement in and carrying out of orders received. The word 'active' occurs several times in the Constitutions to underline, in the spirit of St. Vincent, that the true missionary identifies himself by the apostolic work which he undertakes. He is united with the desire of the Second Vatican Council to value the principle of participation of all religious in the government of their institute. The principle will remain one of the orienting points of the revision of Canon Law. Number 96 of the Constitutions, however, is inspired, in large part, by the conciliar decree *Perfectae Caritatis* which declares specifically: "They (the Superiors) will lead the religious to collaborate by active and responsible obedience as much in the fulfilment of their task as in initiatives to be undertaken" (# 14).

Thus, in community, there is no hierarchy of dignity but each, by reason of his function and place, is called to cooperate in taking responsibility in light of the common work to be undertaken. Responsibilities are defined more by reason of a common will than of an imposed power. That is why they are located in the community and unfurl from there as this (community) is "organised to prepare its apostolic activity and to encourage and help it continually" (# 19). Real responsibility is, in fact, a co-responsibility which is expressed, primarily, within the community. We say, in fact, that: "We should become co-responsible, helped by the necessary services of authority and together with the superior, in seeking the will of God in our life and works, thus engaging in active obedience. Moreover, we should foster mutual dialogue, and in this way overcome an excessively individualistic style of living" (# 24, 2°).

### **The Importance of Community**

It is certain that the importance of community life set out in our Constitutions determines the particular style or mode of government. The structure of a group and the relationships between its constituents determine the exercise of authority and are defined by the powers which are exercised in it. In the subject index of the Constitutions of 1954, the word 'community' does not feature. In the present Constitutions, this term occurs frequently and sometimes in an insistent way. It has different connotations since it refers both to the reality of the religious group and to the relationships between the confreres. It is not by chance that community life is dealt with in the second chapter of our Constitutions and that the local community is defined as a living expression of the whole Congregation (# 23).

This vision of things is characteristic of a style of government. The Common Rules retain all their value to define and maintain our identity and our spirit. They do, however, relate to social and religious structures based on the superior-subject relationships which existed in the sociological milieu of the seventeenth century according to which unity was expressed, above all, in conformity. In this document, the superior appears as the one around whom the community is organised. It is up to him to decide on matters of daily life (V, 5), as well as work (II, 10) and each one must believe that "the superior's response indicates God's will for him" (V, 4). The unity of the group is established by the superior and is maintained through uniformity, "the safeguard of good order and of holiness" (II, 11). Eating, clothing, sleeping as well as "methods of direction, teaching, preaching, exercising authority, and even spiritual practices" (II, 11) must be marked by the desire not to be 'singular.' Uniformity is presented, therefore, as an important criterion for the unity of the religious group, which is defined far more by its relationships "ad intra" than by reference to its openness "ad extra."

This comparison has its limits because of its historical context. In the seventeenth century, authority, based on power, was dominated by the symbol of the omnipotent father. Community, since the Protestant reform held suspect of many errors, did not represent a value in itself. The word itself is not used by Ignatius of Loyola in the rules which he established. However, in modern times, the individual superior-subject relationship is transformed to the benefit of the community at whose heart interpersonal relationships take place. This context allows us to highlight the spirit which currently guides communities, knowing that authority is a responsibility that is not limited but is better spread out in light of the activities of the different members who make up the communities.

### **In God's sight**

This being said, government in the Congregation of the Mission is not exercised in a collegial fashion, even though our particular law foresees numerous obligatory consultations. Authority is neither an expression of, nor emanates from, the general will which delegates its power while keeping the right to oversee and control. Nor does it pertain, as a definitive and inalienable right, to the one who receives it. It is exercised in dependence on the one who has confided it to us, that is God, and by the intermediary of different ecclesial mediations.

It is, thus, an obedience to God, a submission to the Church and a fidelity to the spirit of the Congregation. In this guise, it necessitates a continual spiritual discernment under the motivation of the Spirit and a deep and clear respect for the rules which govern the Congregation. This is the sense of the second part of # 97, § 1, of the Constitutions: "Conscious of their responsibility before God, they shall consider themselves servants of the community for furthering

its own purpose according to the spirit of St. Vincent in a true communion of apostolate and life."

St. Vincent asks, in the Common Rules, that we obey superiors "seeing the Lord in them and them in the Lord" (V, 1). The present Constitutions speak of "authority, which comes from God" (# 97, § 1). They are in accord with Canon Law which affirms, drawing its inspiration from the Conciliar Decree *Perfectae Caritatis*: "Superiors are to exercise their power, received from God through the ministry of the Church, in a spirit of service" (Canon 618). This power cannot be a domination as it is more in the order of a mediation. "It has a sacramental aspect in which the human act is an instrument of divine grace."<sup>9</sup> It is naturally characterised by a spirit of service.

To explain this, the Constitutions appeal to two images which complement each other but which are sufficiently different to be distinguished; the Good Shepherd and the servant. They ask that those who exercise authority have "before their eyes the example of the Good Shepherd, who came not to be served but to serve," an expression which was used for the bishops in the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (# 27). In St. John, Christ presents himself as the one good Shepherd, the one who knows his sheep individually, gathers them together while being ready to go in search of the lost sheep, protects them from dangers and leads them to life-giving places, while showing them an unchanging love. He is, at the same time, the servant of men since he is God's servant. That is why he is meek and humble of heart, capable of setting himself aside and of going to the end in the expressions of love which inspire his service. We find in these two images of Christ an entire spiritual theology of the true leader.

## The Meaning of Dialogue

The spirit of service never takes anything from the authority of superiors. This is affirmed in Canon 618, just cited: "Docile to the will of God in carrying out their duty, they (the superiors) are to govern their subjects as children of God and, promoting their voluntary obedience with reverence for the human person, they are to listen to them willingly and foster their working together for the good of the institute and of the Church, but with the superiors' authority to decide and prescribe what must be done remaining intact."

The Constitutions say the same thing in a similar fashion but more briefly: "They should, therefore, engage in dialogue with members, while retaining the authority to decide and command what is to be done" (# 97, § 2). We find here one of the most favorable

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<sup>9</sup> J. BEYER, *Le droit de la vie consacrée. Commentaires des canons 607-746. Instituts et sociétés*, Tardy, Paris 1988, p. 25.

means to permit the members of a community to show their interest and involvement in a common work. The importance of dialogue is thus emphasised but without any other definition of its nature or its purpose. The goal is simply to mark the parameters, recalling that dialogue, though it leads to reflection and deliberation, cannot oblige the superior who retains his freedom to judge and his power to decide.

In fact, the principal of dialogue is dealt with in the second chapter of the Constitutions. We speak of "open and responsible dialogue" undertaken at the heart of the community so that "common directions may surface and develop, and lead to making decisions" (# 37, § 1). This is inspired by the teaching of Paul VI whose influence has played a significant role in the editing of the Constitutions, since the only explicit pontifical reference is to him.<sup>10</sup> Paul VI put dialogue at the centre of the evangelical mission of the Church. He published his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* on the 6 August 1964, some months before the promulgation of the conciliar Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, explaining that "in dialogue we realise the union of truth and charity, of intelligence and love" (# 85).

Dialogue requires a certain right to information, which may pose a problem for the quality of communication, a subject which is dealt with in minor ways in the Statutes (# 78, § 6 and # 82). In the same way, the exercise of authority requires clarity and precision in its decisions. Canon Law sets out all its demands on this point when it declares; "The decree will be given in written form, setting out, at least in summary, its motives, when it deals with a decision" (Canon 51 which completes Canon 37).

### **To Each His Own Responsibility**

Responsibility demands that each receives the capacity to assume it personally within the limits of the duty which is confided to him. This is the sense of number 98 of the Constitutions which cites, without naming it, the principal of subsidiarity. "... those matters which can be managed by individual members or lower levels of government should not be referred to higher levels of government." This principal, used in the social teaching of the Church to regulate relationships between the State and the individual, has been taken up to define the different levels of responsibility in the Church.<sup>11</sup> The principal of subsidiarity is

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<sup>10</sup> The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is cited three times in the Constitutions (## 10, 11 and 16).

<sup>11</sup> The extraordinary Synod for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Vatican II, in its final report of 7 December 1985, recommends further study on the principle of subsidiarity as applied to the Church.

explicitly named in the ordering of the laws decided on by the General Assembly (# 137, § 3).

The general principals recall the right of exemption which the Congregation enjoys (# 99) before concluding with the powers of the different levels of government. A final remark, which has elicited a number of reactions, accompanies this conclusion: "Superiors, therefore, must be in sacred orders" (# 100) which hinders the nomination of a brother as a superior. This imposition, which Rome has also imposed on other clerical Congregations, may be regrettable, but it must be admitted that it is coherent with our Constitutions. In these, only the clerics "according to the order received and after the example of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is Priest, Shephard, and Teacher, fulfill their vocation through the exercise of this three-fold function in every kind of apostolate which can contribute to achieving the purpose of the Congregation" (# 52, § 1).

It has been necessary to halt for a time on these general principals which treat of government in the Congregation of the Mission (## 96-100) because these determine its spirit and constitute the real newness of these Constitutions. The rules particular to each office which follow are not, as a whole, original.<sup>12</sup> The last redaction of these texts was mainly concerned with dividing them into Constitutions and Statutes. This is not unimportant as only the Holy See can give the authentic interpretation of the Constitutions, while the interpretation of the Statutes is confided to the General Assembly (# 137, § 5).

### The Four Principal Norms

Nevertheless, we can draw out four principal norms which give a particular newness to the Constitutions and which are in a direct line from the rules we have cited previously: the set time-limits of appointments, consultation, freedom with regard to certain nomination processes and the obligation to have a common plan, either provincial or local.

The set time-limit to appointments is a constant in the organisation of Congregations. Functions being defined as services, it

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<sup>12</sup> Several studies have already appeared on this subject. Thus, the offices of Superior General, Assistant General and the other Assistants have been dealt with in the course of the 38<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (*Vincentiana* 4-5 [1992], pp. 489-515). The regular meetings of Visitors have been the occasions for presenting and explaining the function of the Visitor (*Vincentiana* 4-5 [1989]; 4-5 [1996]). As for the role of the local superior, it is often dealt with at provincial level. Fr. Richard McCullen gave an excellent exposition on this subject in Dublin in February 1997 under the title of "Mission at the Heart of the Mission; the Local Superior," cf. *Bulletin des Lazaristes de France*, April 1998, pp. 103-109.



is appropriate that the time of involvement should be limited to allow for the renewal of personnel and to encourage the inventive dynamism of communities. Canon Law requires that "Superiors should be named for a determined and suitable period of time" (Canon 624, § 1). This prescription existed in our own former law. It was extended to apply also to the Superior General whose appointment may not exceed a second period of six years (# 105, § 3). It is, moreover, this election (of the Superior General) which sets the rhythm for the convocation of ordinary General Assemblies (# 137, § 2; # 138, § 1).

The responsibility of confreres is exercised through consultations or whatever takes their place. With regard to the election of the Superior General, "there is to be fostered free communication of information regarding the matters to be decided and the qualities of those to be elected" (Statute 82). For the Visitor and the local superior, consultation with the confreres concerned is indispensable (# 124; # 130, § 1). For their choice, great freedom is permitted to the Provincial Assembly with regard to the mode of election (Statute # 68, §§ 2 and 3, Constitution # 130, § 2).

Finally, the obligation of getting projects underway, either at provincial or local level, is seen as a new way and major means of unifying the life of the confreres and giving dynamism to apostolic action. It is set down that the provincial plan should be undertaken with the consent of the Council of the Visitor (Statute # 69, § 1) and that the community plan manifests the true expression of the local community (Constitution # 27; Statutes # 16; 69, § 5; 78, § 4). Each confrere is invited to take part in this (Constitution # 32, § 1; Statute # 19). The number of references which relate to this sufficiently underline the particular interest accorded to the community plan.

A more administrative 'novelty' is the profile of the Vicar General. He was traditionally the confrere who was designated in secret by the Superior General to take over in the interim in the case of death. He now appears as the second-in-command in the Congregation, with the duty of replacing the Superior General in his absence, incapacity or death. Elected by the General Assembly, he "automatically becomes also an assistant general" (# 109). It seems that his role has rendered obsolete that of the Admonitor which has been done away with for the Superior General as for other offices, even though it dates back to the time of St. Vincent.

Contrary to the former Constitutions, the spiritual and human qualities required to be a superior are no longer set out, apart from the rule that he must be at least three years incorporated into the Congregation and aged at least twenty-five (# 61). Since each function is, however, defined in a succinct but implicit manner, it is easy to deduce from this the qualities required to take on this role. The Superior General is put forward as the "centre of unity and coordination of the provinces" (# 102). The Visitor must encourage

“the active participation of all the members in the life and apostolate of the province” (# 123, § 2). As for the local superior, he is the “centre of unity and animator of the life of the local community” (# 129, § 2). It is understood that each will respond as well as possible to what is expected of him. One could say that, schematically, the Superior General coordinates, the Visitor stimulates and the local superior animates.

Government is an important element in the life of a Congregation. Our current Constitutions present it in a spirit which is at odds with the cold expressions of the former Constitutions. Following the outlines of Vatican II, they move beyond the juridical character of the rules which direct us, in order to make them more ‘global’ in a spiritual vision which gives them a more significant and lively dimension. The Congregation of the Mission is not simply an association with a religious character. The organisation is animated by the desire to insert itself, with its own charism, into the life of the Church and to respond to its needs. That is why the importance given to the general principals of government show that this is not simply a structural element but that it also contributes to the identity of the Congregation, as desired by St. Vincent.

(EUGENE CURRAN, C.M., translator)



# The New Constitutions

## Tradition and Renewal

by Carlo Braga, C.M.

*Province of Rome*

The history of the present Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission begins with the General Assembly of 1968-1969. This was an extraordinary Assembly, whose purpose was to concretize the renewal that Vatican II had requested of the Institutes of Religious Life, to be conducted on the basis of very precise principles (PC 2-3). These are: 1) clear definition of the charism, as the ideal for following Christ, the supreme rule of consecration and the modalities for its realization; 2) faithful interpretation and observance of the spirit and of the proper purposes of the founders, of the healthy traditions and the spiritual heritage of the Institute; 3) participation in the life and the concerns of the Church; and 4) profound spiritual renewal of the communities. The reason behind this was clear: "The constitutions, the directories, the books of customs, and of prayers [...] are to be reviewed as is appropriate, and are to be modified on the basis of the documents that have come forth from this sacred Council, once the prescriptions that are no longer current have been suppressed." These principles were further explained and made precise by Paul VI in the *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae* of August 6, 1966 (II, 12-14, 17: EV I, 852-854, 857).

The work was not easy, and in the Assembly was long and, especially in 1968-69, tiring. Often, under a single heading, ideals and ideas very diverse rubbed up against each other. There were strong differences in defining the end of the Congregation, and there was the danger of creating a certain opposition among evangelization of the poor, service to the clergy, and other activities. In the definition of fraternal life one could have given greater importance or put in conflict with each other community life and respect for the person. Compromises had to be sought, at times at a heavy cost. I think about the declaration, approved in 1969, which emptied of significance the prioritizing choice of evangelization and the human promotion of the poor. It actually affirmed that this was not the sole end of the Company, that it was a sufficient criterion, but not the only one, and not necessary in choosing works. These are affirmations that make one think and give thanks for the journey of "conversion" that the Company has lived. But they make evident the

disparity of views on the term "tradition," on the ideas that came from it and the difficulty in reconciling these ideas.

The pause for reflection brought by the Assembly of 1974 was a healthy one. It remanded the presentation of a text of the Constitutions to the Holy See for six years, and asked the Company to reflect on the journey discovered and lived over time by St. Vincent, so that it would be our own in the situations of a world different from his. Even a certain turnover among the members of the Assembly facilitated the editing of a series of "Declarations" that helped the peaceful maturing of many ideas during the succeeding years.

The General Assembly of 1980, with another turnover of members, and thus of ideas, with the reflections and the experience of the six preceding years, even with notable difficulties (think of Article 1, which defines the end of the Congregation — it was the last thing to be approved), was able to arrive at a more peaceful setting down of the norms of life for the Congregation.

The mind of the Assembly concerning the concretization of the renewal requested by the Council that we find expressed in the "Introduction," which precedes the actual and proper text of the Constitutions, came into being as a presentation of a historical nature of the maturation of the thought of St. Vincent concerning the end of the Congregation. The Assembly amplified it, including in it all the personal experience of St. Vincent in the founding of the Community, and in the delineation of its specific identity. Recognizing the particular moment of grace that the Company was living through, it affirmed: "The same Congregation, desiring to maintain and express in the Church its place and its end, believes it necessary to return to its origins, to the spiritual experience and teachings of St. Vincent, so that it can not only deepen and faithfully protect its original character and the spirit of its Founder, but also draw from the same fountains a more stimulating inspiration to respond to its vocation, always attentive to the will of God that, just as in St. Vincent, it be revealed to her in a particular way in the conditions of the needs of the poor in contemporary society." Fidelity to the authentic tradition of the Founder is expressed in the full acceptance of No. 1 of the Common Rules, in which St. Vincent indicates the means with which the Company "wants to imitate Christ the Lord," to "imitate his virtues, as well as what he did for the salvation of others." The openness to adaptation appears in the concluding phrase of the Introduction: "In these words, St. Vincent entrusted to the confreres of the Congregation, his followers in the Lord, a unique vocation, a new kind of community life, and an exacting purpose that, with wisdom, should be continually adapted to each new age."

Today the Congregation is guided by the new Constitutions, which constitute the juridical code of its life. This code has been prepared in such a way that the Constitutions not only be a dry gathering of laws, but that they be an instrument that helps us to live

authentically the spirit and the ideal of the Founder, reproducing faithfully his doctrine and his expectations. For us, the doctrine and the ideal of St. Vincent are found above all in the Common Rules, and in the Conferences with which he himself explained the value and the significance of each of the Rules. Not the words, but the substance has passed into the text of the Constitutions, it pervades it, and interprets the text for the new situations in which we find ourselves living. We must, therefore, read and observe the Constitutions we have with constant referral to the Common Rules. The literary genre and the juridical import of each are different in the life of the Congregation; but the inspiration that stimulates our spirituality and sustains our relationship to the ideal to which we have dedicated ourselves is the same.

Making a complete and systematic list, a parallel, if you would, of the elements from the founding and authentic tradition of the Congregation that are preserved in the new Constitutions, as well as an accounting of the changes introduced in view of the documents of the Council, does not seem useful to me. It would amount to an academic exercise. I think that it is more to the point to underline some essential themes that show the faithfulness to and the development in the purposes and the nature of the Company. I now list a few.

### **The End of the Company**

One of the first elements to be clear about is certainly the end of the Company. A rereading of the events that brought us to the text we have is useful.

St. Vincent, in the Common Rules, indicates as "end" three concrete elements: working on one's own perfection, evangelizing the country poor, and helping ecclesiastics in their formation: three concrete "things" that he, using the language of his time, defined as the "end." He keeps the same way of speaking in his conference of December 6, 1658: after a rapid accent on the need to imitate Christ in what he did and taught, especially in the virtues and in his interior attachments, he spends some time on the three concrete aspects of the end indicated in the Rules. The Company has continued to express itself as its Founder had.

In the revision of the Constitutions of 1953, there was a felt need for renewal. New social situations had brought us new experiences, especially in the field of education, to whose attention the Church gave encouragement. Some provinces had seriously committed themselves to this field. While maintaining the expression of our tradition, a distinction arose between general end, consisting of "seeking the glory of God and the proper perfection of each member," and the special end, which, to the evangelization of the poor and the service of the clergy was added that of "taking care of works of charity and education."

In 1968, under the push of the conciliar intuitions, there was a desire to place highly the aspect of evangelization and human promotion of the poor as characteristic of the Vincentian vocation. The text of the proposed new Constitutions repeated, in a renewed form, the three "ends" listed in the Common Rules and, omitting the addition of 1953, affirmed: "Therefore, the evangelization of the poor and their human and Christian promotion will always be for her a sign that will keep united all the members of the Community and urge us on to the apostolate (n. 5)." The affirmation sounded for many as a renunciation of the works created with great sacrifices; it seemed to concentrate everything on the missions, placing the works of education in second place, including the seminaries. No one was discounting the importance of the missions, but some feared that other works would be considered as second-rate, and that the young, already inclined toward activities of direct apostolate, would be estranged from her works of formation, including the seminaries. One thus understands the declaration that, as a compromise, was voted in the session of 1969.

The Declarations of 1974 maintained the affirmation of the evangelization of the poor and opened the Congregation up to a further reflection for deepening our appreciation of the thought of St. Vincent, and they indicated a path for that deepening.

In 1980, to maintain the same affirmation, two things said in the Common Rules were stressed. The first, in the Introduction, said that the Company and its members are "called to continue the same mission of Christ, which consists above all in the evangelization of the poor." The second, in n. 1, confirms that "the little Congregation of the Mission wants, with God's grace, to imitate Christ, the Lord, in so far as possible in view of its limitations. It seeks to imitate his virtues as well as what he did for the salvation of others." It is evident that St. Vincent links up the three elements that he calls the "end" in an ideal picture. It is that of the imitation of Christ, who evangelizes the poor, and in such a way gives them a specific significance. It is that which the new Constitutions express in the article which defines the end of the Congregation (n. 1). The picture is complete and clear as we read in context the conclusion of the Introduction and Articles 1, 2, and 18 of the Constitutions. The end appears as an ideal capable of filling and transforming a life. Central is the link between the figure of Christ the evangelizer and the figure of the poor. These have the power to give life to the community and to each member for finding one's own perfection through "putting on the spirit of Christ" (CR I, 3); of committing them to the evangelization of the poor, "especially the most abandoned," of forming and guiding clerics and lay persons "to participate in a more committed way, in the evangelization of the poor." It is what Christ did with his disciples. This end, unchangeable as an ideal, will require a continual renewal in the forms of achieving it. The Congregation, attentive to the Gospel, to the appeals of the Church, and to the signs of the times,

"should take care to open up new ways and use new means adapted to the circumstances ... to evaluate and plan its works and ministries" (n. 2). It will be, as was St. Vincent, the Good Samaritan who, with efficacious means, will meet the most abandoned to help them to be the authors of their own reinsertion in society (n. 18).

## The Figure of Christ

The Christological aspect is characteristic of Vincentian spirituality. St. Vincent lives Christ not as an abstract reality to contemplate, but as an ideal of life and as an inspiration for his evangelizing work. It is a Christ, filled with the Spirit of the Lord, sent to the world to announce and put into motion the reign of God (Lk 4). It is a Christ united to the Father through a love and a devoted respect that leads him to seek out and to fulfill the will of God in a total abandonment to him. It is a Christ fully inserted in the reality of the world, participant in the suffering and the hope of the poor he evangelizes.

It is Christ who he proposes to his Community in the committed dimension in which he himself lives: "He is the rule of the Mission" (SV XII, 130). For this reason his figure is always present to him, to inspire the practical norms of the Community. We read in the Introduction to the Common Rules: "I have tried to base all the Rules, where possible, on the spirit and the actions of Jesus Christ. My idea was that men who are called to continue Christ's mission, which is mainly preaching the good news to the poor, should see things from his point of view, and want what he wanted." The example and the teaching of Christ inspire every norm. Typical are the chapters on the evangelical maxims, on the evangelical counsels, on the practices of piety, on the ministries of the Company. In St. Vincent, there is no abandonment to sentimentalism or detached devotions. Teaching and practice are completely inspired only by the Gospel, the true rule of life.

The new Constitutions cannot distance themselves from the example of the Founder. Christ, the evangelizer of the poor (Lk 4:18), immediately appears in the first numbers to give light to the end of the Congregation. His love that feels compassion for the multitude (Mt 8:2) inspires and guides the apostolic activity. His call to the apostles to become evangelizers of the poor sustains fraternal life. The example leads to the practice of the evangelical counsels. The union with the Father and the seeking of his will in the fulfillment of the mission illumines prayer. The example of the Good Shepherd inspires the conduct of the one called to guide the confreres and the individual communities to the realization of their vocation.

These are only some indications that show the preoccupation of the drafters of the new Constitutions to maintain alive the Christological aspect of our vocation in the life and the activity of the

Company. That will be more alive and efficacious, if the reading and the practice of the Constitutions are illuminated by a parallel and complementary reading of the Common Rules.

## The Church

Next to Christ we spontaneously place the Church, in which Christ manifests himself and through which he continues to fulfill his mission. From St. Vincent, we cannot expect sensational affirmations: his ecclesiology was that of the Tridentine Council, rather limited. We can, however, gather from him a clear sense and a precise concern for ecclesial communion.

Above all, he has a sense of belonging to the Church. In n. 18 of the second chapter of the Common Rules he writes: "... the little Congregation of the Mission came *into existence in the Church* [emphasis added] to work for the salvation of people, especially the rural poor." If we wish to read these words in modern language, it is easy to note the conscience of belonging to the Church through a specific charism that allows a participation in the Church's mission.

From this prelude come some concrete applications. Communion with the Church should be expressed through a "faithful and sincere" obedience to the Pope (*CR V, 1*). Communion with the local Church happens through a humble obedience "according to the specific nature of our institute" (*CR V, 1*), that is, with respect for the particular exemption of the Company, but in full dependence on the bishop for the exercise of various ministries. For this reason, St. Vincent underlines the necessity of getting faculties from the bishop for confessions (*CR XI, 6*) and for the preaching of missions (*CR XI, 5*); and he desires that the missionaries ask the blessing of pastors at the beginning of the missions (*CR XI, 6*). He demands acts of obedience to ecclesiastical laws, but he also expresses his consciousness of ecclesial communion.

The Constitutions, following upon the conciliar documents, are able to make use of a different and more precise language than that of the 17th century. Because of the communion we share in the mystery of the Trinity (*C 20*), the Company senses that it is Church, and it expresses itself in it through its particular charism (*C 3*). With good reason it applies to itself the affirmation of Paul VI for the Church (*Evangelii Nuntiandi 14*), believing that "in a very particular way, the mandate to evangelize is for her [the Church] grace and her proper vocation, the expression of her deepest identity" (*C 10*). From these affirmations of principle they derive precise practical commitments: attention to the more urgent needs of the Church (*C 2*), close collaboration with bishops and with diocesan clergy (*C 3 § 2*), insertion of its apostolate in the pastoral plans of the local Church (*C 13*), the acceptance of the magisterium of the Church as the guide for its formation and its life (*C 78 § 3*). A significant



commitment that it assumes, responding to its tradition, is the care and formation of lay people. Beyond the spiritual assistance to lay groups that descend from St. Vincent (S 7), the Company commits itself to the formation of lay people according to its own charism and according to the spirit of the founder, and thus to educate them to a feeling for, a love for, and a committed serve of the poor, and to the promotion of social justice. A new element is the preparation of lay people to the lay ministries necessary for the Christian community, and to active collaboration with priests (C 15). The ecclesial spirit is evident, and is expanded outside the confines of its own internal life.

The sense of Church and love for her wishes to manifest itself above all in the traditional commitment to help the clergy in its formation, but now with a new element of preparing them for "a fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor" (C 1, 3°), making of the poor a prioritized choice for its ministry. The forms of service to the clergy are no longer those of the time of St. Vincent. But they remain a part of our activity, perhaps the most important and demanding, to study and set up according to totally new expressions, with a profound friendship and participation with priests as the starting point.

## The Poor

Next to Jesus Christ, St. Vincent always placed the poor person as a magnet for his ideals and his life. His spiritual journey was illuminated by his discovery of the poor, by his participation in his suffering, from the disquiet of spirit of meeting so many miserable situations that Providence put in his paths. His journey was a progressive opening of himself to the movement of the Spirit, and a communicating of this growing experience as if it were a seed on a piece of land made fertile by grace. The poor country person of Gannes was only a starting point. After him were joined many other poor people who received care from St. Vincent, and who made the direction his Congregation was growing in more focused. These poor people made his mind stretch, made him mature, made him greater, and kept him in the present. In the conference on the end of the Company (December 6, 1658), St. Vincent adds many other categories to the poor country people in need of evangelization, for the number of people in need grew continually because of changing social conditions. These too became part of the family who experienced his charity.

It is not our place to attempt a synthesis of his thought and commitment. We know them. I would sum them up in those words taken from a letter to Fr. Almérás (December 8, 1649), reported by Collet in his biography of Vincent: "The poor, who do not know where to go, nor what to do; the poor who already suffer so much and are always becoming more numerous; these are my burden and my pain" (*Life of St. Vincent*, vol. I, book V, ed. 1748, p. 479). These

are words full of reality, that still have the power to make one think and to make commitments given the globalization of poverty. I do not believe that St. Vincent would renounce these words today.

We ask ourselves: how does the Community respond; what are the commitments that the Constitutions propose to it?

During the Council, people spoke a lot about the "Church of the poor." The phrase ran the risk of becoming fashionable. But the Congregation of the Mission could not help but be concerned, as it reread its spiritual heritage, to make this enter into its own programs, in its own tensions of renewal. A few accents will be sufficient to sum up and propose the lines that the Congregation took.

In the same way as the Church, the Congregation of the Mission proposes for itself, as the ideal that illuminates and concretizes its end, the evangelization of the poor following the example of Christ who evangelized them, and through the Congregation, continues today his mission (*C 1, 10, 12, 18*). Poor are not confined to a definite social category, except in that of the "most abandoned." This program is affirmed and lived out by other religious communities, but it is particularly significant for the Congregation of the Mission: it is born from its very roots.

The evangelization that the Company wishes to do will be inspired by a "compassionate and effective" love (*C 6*). St. Vincent spoke of *affective* and *effective* love. Evangelization is about bringing the Gospel, the Good News of the coming of the Reign of God, but the commitment to make that love effective cannot be missing. One must love with works and in truth.

That requires preparation: to learn to be aware of the causes of poverty and the way to combat them; to get to know, to love, and to accept the poor; to make of the service of the poor the *motivation* of consecration (*C 28-39*) and of fraternal life as preparation and sustenance for mission (*C 19, 25, 2°*); to carry the poor in prayer and to transform service into prayer, making a foundation for unity between prayer and apostolic work (*C 42-44*); to live "some participation in the condition of the poor" (*C 12, 3°*). The program is the object and fruit both of formation in all its cycles, including ongoing (*C 78, 85*), and of progressive and effective contact with the reality of the poor: it is to evangelize the poor by allowing oneself to be evangelized (*C 12, 3°*).

The service of the poor must not be only comfort, or assistance for the small-change necessities of life. It carries with it a serious commitment, together with specific associations, in the defense of human rights and in the promotion of social justice (*C 18, 78*).

It is understandable why the Congregation must not be content with the communal and personal commitment of its members. It must extend to all those who come near them in its ministry, priests and lay people, a knowledge and a love for the poor, and a desire to



serve them (*C* 1, 2°, 3°; 15, etc.). The fire needs to spread and grow, because love is diffusive, and is infinitely creative.

I wish to underline one other fact. Service must also be formation for those who receive it: the poor. The words of n. 18 of the Constitutions are significant, for they invite everyone to work "for them and with them." Charity must reign, but must also form the person to be the author of his own promotion.

These are only accents. But they gather faithfully the more felt and urgent moments of the teaching of the Council (e.g. in *Gaudium et Spes*) and by the later magisterium. Here comes together an ample and renewed field in which our tradition opens itself. Its cultivation will seek preparation, creativity, and courage.

### **Fraternal Life and Prayer**

Common fraternal life has always been a characteristic of the institutes of consecrated life, very esteemed by the founders. Charity, sharing, example and mutual building up exchanged among the members were destined to sustain the common effort to live consecration and prayer, and to witness to the fruitfulness of the Gospel.

St. Vincent wished for his Congregation, from the beginning, a fraternal life in community as an expression of charity, but above all as a preparation and as a means of sustenance for apostolic work. The members of the Congregation, as "dear friends," were to live, pray, work, and share all the realities of life together. That became visible above all in the work of the missions: the key of the house left to a neighbor is a proverbial example of this. Over time the tensions that are born from the needs of a common life at home and a continual apostolic life were not lacking. The Congregation of the Mission also felt the necessity of revising and making more precise the relationship between the two.

Vatican II, in *Perfectae Caritatis* (*C* 15), has rather generic affirmations concerning common life, that take their starting point from the traditional texts of the Acts to exalt charity. Only the last sentence accents the value of fraternal life as it relates to the apostolate.

The Congregation of the Mission, reviewing its Constitutions, wished to recuperate the principles and the values that St. Vincent had left to his spiritual family. In the eighth chapter of the Common Rules, concerning the relationships among ourselves, we find no great doctrinal principles concerning charity, communion, and collaboration. The Conferences are much richer in them. The General Assembly, working attentively, brought them back together and proposed them again for our consideration. I go through them briefly.

The fundamental statement is that which opens the chapter (C 19): "St. Vincent brought confreres together with Church approval so that, living a new form of community life, they might undertake the evangelization of the poor. The Vincentian community is, therefore, organized to *prepare* its apostolic activity and to *encourage* and *help it continually* [emphasis added]. And so, members, individually and collectively, should strive to fulfill their common mission through a wholehearted spirit of renewal in fraternal union." The same ideas return in n. 21. What is new in the Vincentian tradition is fraternity, not only of life, but also of apostolate.

Fundamental to this community is the Trinitarian communion in its missionary dimension (C 20), according to an image that is decidedly Vincentian. Animation is given by charity, concretized in the practice of the five virtues, which leads to joy in fraternal assistance, to co-responsibility in collaboration, to respect of persons and other opinions, right up to fraternal correction and reconciliation, to the creation of a human and spiritual environment that our life needs (C 24).

To make this ideal happen the Constitutions ask for the total gift of ourselves and all we have — a gift which the community must value and make grow through attention and growth of attitudes and personal initiatives, doing everything it can to keep alive communion and apostolic work.

Each person is unique for his qualities and his mission. We can say the same thing for local communities: each one is "a living part of the whole Congregation" and contributes, in its individuality, to the good of the whole Congregation. Thus, the life of individual communities and their formation will be individual, within the necessary unity of all, so that they live out more authentically the values of the end, of the apostolate, of prayer, and of common life.

The concern for fraternal life in community and the way it affects the whole life of the Congregation asks for an accent on the life of prayer. I do it as I recall, without comment, n. 42 of the Constitutions. It links very well the various aspects of the life of the Community: "Apostolic involvement with the world, community life, and the experience of God in prayer, complement one another and make an organic unity in the life of a missionary. For, when we pray, faith, fraternal love, and apostolic zeal are constantly renewed; and in action, the love of God and neighbor is effectively manifested. Through the intimate union of prayer and apostolate a missionary becomes a contemplative in action and an apostle in prayer."

The chapters of the Constitution on fraternal life and prayer go far beyond the schematic conciliar indications, and, I would say, even of the Common Rules. They enter into the living charism of the spirit and the doctrine of St. Vincent, and they offer a picture of rich colors and shapes that illuminate the whole life of the Company.

## Organization

The thread that has guided our journey up to now has lead us to reread the chapters of the Constitutions that contain above all principles and doctrinal orientations. These, however, are elements to be lived, and are applied in the organization of the community, in a picture of necessary renewal of structure and form. The Council had already given this challenge to the Church, by opening reflection on inculturation and adaptation. This means to express in the unity of immutable and essential elements riches hidden in various cultures and in the growth of the human spirit. The challenge, through the Church, arrives at religious communities, and to us.

I wish to direct attention to three aspects, of principle and practices, that can have notable effect on the life and the structure of the community: participation and co-responsibility; adaptation; and decentralization.

The fulfillment of participation and co-responsibility contain the right, the duty, and the possibility for all to cooperate in the good of the apostolic community and to participate in its government in an active and responsible manner (*C 96* and *98*). We can see the practical applications of this, for example, in the designation of provincial superiors (*C 124*), of local superiors (*C 130*), in general (*C 139*) and provincial (*C 146*) assemblies, or through the elected participation or the presence of the whole community in domestic assemblies (*C 27*) in the various councils (*S 74*), and in the formulation of the local projects (*C 27*). All must feel themselves involved in the decisions that regard everyone through a personal and responsible commitment.

Adaptation tends to overcome the monolithic and at times mortifying uniformity of living and productive potentialities. Already St. Vincent was insisting on a concept of uniformity, but more as a coming together of sentiments than as an equality of uses and rules. We are seeing the practical applications of adaptation in the life of the Church, if only in the field of liturgy.

In the Constitutions the indicated points are significant. The way to observe evangelical poverty, given the different exigencies of various places, must be studied by the provincial assemblies (*S 18*). Fraternal life in community and forms of prayer are necessarily subject to the research and the needs of each community, so that they be constructive and efficacious. The same formation, even though respecting our essential unity, must respond to the culture of each place, and to the situations and the needs of those being formed. The directories of general character, and the decisions of assemblies, will always be subject to adaptation on the local level so that they will be effective.

Decentralization tends to recognize the decisive power of groups on the periphery in the area of co-responsibility. We see it in the

Church with the setting up of the national and regional episcopal conferences, and the passing to local bishops of powers that were once held by the central government.

The most obvious expression of this in the Congregation is the power of the provincial assemblies to establish norms for the common good of the province (*C 143*); there is also the right of provinces to judge which forms of apostolate they should take up, given their place in the local Church (*C 13*), etc.

These are all expressions of change that have entered in practice, and of which we do not perceive more evidently the significance of their newness. They would be rethought in a more lively way to make them more incisive in the life of our communities.

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St. Vincent loved to say that the Common Rules came from the Spirit of God, were inspired by Jesus Christ, and that they contained nothing that was contrary to the doctrine of the Gospel. Their observance, therefore, would bring ever-new graces on the Company.

As the Common Rules, so the new Constitutions are the fruit of waiting, of prayer, of suffering, and of hope. In these as well there is the presence of the evangelical spirit, of the person of Jesus, of the love for the Church, for the Community, for the poor. Three General Assemblies and the whole community worked on them. So, everyone as perceived the passing through of the Spirit that brought new life to the Company, guiding her in the rediscovery of her original and fertile values. Twenty years later, we need to reanimate our hope again, and acquire the capacity to look a long way in the light of God.

(ROBERT STONE, C.M., translator)

# Read and Pray the Constitutions

by Miguel Pérez Flores, C.M.

Province of Salamanca

## Faithful to the letter and the spirit of the Constitutions

1. The Constitutions were published on June 29, the feast of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, in 1984. The then Superior General, Fr. Richard McCullen, wrote a short presentation of them in which he affirmed that he was sending them out with a joyful spirit. He made the following observation: *the degree that we are faithful to the letter and spirit of the Constitutions will determine to a great extent the degree of our dedication to the local Church in which the Congregation is inserted.* In the next section he added: *The identity of the Congregation within the Church is spelled out in the pages of this book. But let us not allow that identity to be found only within it. We should, then, imprint the text of the Constitutions in the deepest part of our heart and express it in our daily living to achieve our vocation of evangelizing the poor.* The conclusion that the Superior General took was evident and corresponds to the title of these reflections: reading and praying the Constitutions, reading them frequently and accompanying this reading with an assiduous prayer. His observation ended with the desire that the Constitutions become efficacious means so that, according to the prayer to St. Vincent, *we might easily love what St. Vincent loved and happily practice what he taught.*

## A book for life or for the library?

2. Sixteen years have passed and again the theme of *reading and praying the Constitutions* comes up. It is possible that in some missionaries the first fervor of those sixteen years, in which the entire Congregation enthusiastically lived the constitutional project, has grown cold. Many years have passed from the approval (1984) until now, the beginning of the 21st Century, burdened with the bewildering changes of the times. The Congregation in many provinces is different; there have been many congregational events, such as the lack of vocations, much pastoral work and the need for action, and the slight attraction for reading juridical-spiritual books. These may have been some of the reasons or the occasion for putting off the reading of the Constitutions. Moreover, the Constitutions tend toward stability and are by their very nature written at a certain

moment. All of this has led, and continues to lead, to the Constitutions and Statutes being a book for the shelf and for domestic discussions; that is, a book for the library or for the drawer, and not a book for life.

## Two anecdotes

3. I was once invited to explain the first part of the Constitutions, which treats the Vocation of the Congregation of the Mission. That is where the core of the Vincentian identity is found: the ends, the spirit, the marks of the proper Vincentian work, the canonical-spiritual characteristics of the Congregation, the spirit and its expressions; that is, the characteristic virtues of the Vincentian missionary.

4. It seems that my presentation showed a certain enthusiasm for the content of the constitutional texts and for the way in which they are expressed. Suddenly I was interrupted by the voice of a young missionary who, humbly and sincerely, said in front of the whole group that he admired my enthusiasm. He was given the book of Constitutions. No one told him anything. No one explained them to him. He gratefully took the book and buried it in the deepest part of his desk drawer. He took it from there to come to the course because he did not want to be a soldier who went off to war without the right weapon. But he did not know how to use it. Now, in this course, he was learning the what and the why of the Constitutions.

5. Another objection that has been put to me on more than one occasion has been that of the deeds. According to these objectors, the Constitutions paralyze creativity. What interests them are deeds, works in favor of the poor, works that are significantly Vincentian. In fact, they ask, how much have individuals and the provinces changed since the formulation of the new Constitutions? My response in these cases has not been silence. It has been to read word for word Article 2 of the Constitutions, for me one of the most open and applicable and, up to a point, the criteria by which a new generation of missionaries can judge an older one. *With this purpose in view, the Congregation of the Mission, faithful to the gospel, and always attentive to the signs of the times and the more urgent calls of the Church, should take care to open up new ways and use new means adapted to the circumstances of time and place. Moreover, it should strive to evaluate and plan its works and ministries, and in this way remain in a continual state of renewal.*

6. Much creativity inspires the said Article 2 and few are the restrictions contained in it, other than what pertains to the end of the Congregation: to follow Christ, evangelizer of the poor in the light of St. Vincent's inspiration. The reason why they did not see significantly Vincentian deeds and works has to be placed somewhere else, not in the Constitutions which calls for doing what is not being done and denouncing what is not done in a Vincentian way.

7. I could also cite another article, just as open and inspirational for creativity, Article 18: *Following St. Vincent, who, like the Good Samaritan of the gospel parable (Lk 10:30-37), gave effective help to the abandoned, provinces and members should earnestly strive to serve those rejected by society and those who are victims of disasters and injustices of every kind. We should also assist those who suffer from forms of moral poverty which are peculiar to our own times. Working for all of these and with them, members should endeavor to implement the demands of social justice and evangelical charity.*

### **Reasons for reading the Constitutions**

8. I do not know if the two cases are isolated or frequent incidents. In any case, we have to insist on reading and praying the Constitutions. In them, despite their limitations, are preserved the updating of the founder's spiritual and apostolic experience, the theological and ecclesial identity of the missionary, the expression of God's salvific plan, the way to personal sanctification, apostolic effectiveness and testimony of life for persons given to God and the service of others in the Congregation of the Mission, and prayer in its triple expression: liturgical, community and mental.

### **The new formulation of the Constitutions**

9. Many founders have had difficulties in passing on their spiritual experience or intuition to an institution; that is, describing and creating the institution most suitable to the demands of their intuition or charism so that it can be made visible and efficacious. They have had problems giving it the wheels needed to move through history. By means of special aid from the Spirit they were able to do it. The Congregation itself has considered the time dedicated to the formulation of the Constitutions as a *special time of grace*, and affirms *having experienced the action of the Holy Spirit which passed over it and inspired it to renew itself and to follow the footsteps of St. Vincent*. The presence of the Spirit was felt in the midst of the *fervet opus* of everyone. One of the assiduous agents and a faithful witness of the work of the assembly was Carlo Braga who wrote: *Let no one say that the Company was indifferent to a problem so vital as the revision of the Constitutions*. Moreover, the ecclesiastical approval is a guaranty, if not the best than a good and safe one, in everything that refers to our vocation as sons of St. Vincent.

### **The cordial and constant acceptance of the Constitutions**

10. If the principal value in reading the Constitutions is that they are the written expression of the charism, the spirit, the apostolate, common fraternal life, the life of prayer, the orientations for



governing and for administering common goods and, in general, what has spiritual apostolic, ecclesial and Vincentian value for the insertion of the Congregation in the Church, their *cordial and constant acceptance* is the first step toward them that every missionary should take if he wants be faithful to his vocation as an authentic Vincentian.

11. The acceptance to which I am referring is cordial not juridical. The latter is imposed. The former is accepted from the heart. For love of one's vocation and for the Congregation that supports it, the values of the Constitutions are interiorized and put into practice. The present Constitutions are a congregational act and, therefore, the acceptance is a dynamic process of the whole body of the Congregation and not just a few people with responsibility. Cordial acceptance is required so that they can work and create an environment of appreciation and congregational action just as universal canon law should be accepted as an ecclesial act and not only as an event which is valid for the history of ecclesial law.

12. Acceptance should lead, not only to a superficial reading, but to a deeper study of the Constitutions, above all of the articles with a more theological than juridical nature, such as, for example, Article 5, which affirms that the spirit of the Congregation is a participation in the spirit of Christ, which makes Christ the Rule of the Mission, the center of its life and activity.

13. The sixth article is no less demanding when it is known and studied more deeply. It places us in the soul of Christ and points out three marks of a Vincentian christology: love and reverence for the Father, compassionate and effective charity for the poor and docility to Divine Providence. Much has been written and will continue to be written about the christology lived and transmitted by St. Vincent. The Constitutions do us the favor of promoting the desire to know his christological experience. According to the document *Mutuas Relaciones* of May 14, 1978, the true and faithful followers of a charism which they have inherited not only preserve it, but promote and update it.

14. The need for deeper study grows when Article 7 points out that to express the spirit of Christ through the Vincentian prism it is necessary to practice the virtues which, according to St. Vincent himself, characterize the missionary: simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification and zeal. The implications that each one of these virtues bears in the present world are great: simplicity as the splendor of truth in a world wounded by political, propaganda and economic interests; humility as a preference for the other, when we live in a society in which selfishness has taken root; meekness to wipe away from human relations any sign or trace of violence; mortification when the world of abundance takes over; zeal for God's glory in times when ferocious secularism tries to destroy the name of God and everything related to him from the face of the earth.



## Living the Constitutions

15. The Constitutions, all together and well harmonized, should be lived. This begins by reading them with simplicity, like *lectio constitutional*, like *lectio divina*, keeping a distance. This continues, entering more deeply into them, by finally giving them life. If the Constitutions are not lived, we would fall into a malaise which would destroy the strength of the Congregation, its unity and vocation, creating disappointment in the members and the belief that the charism as received from St. Vincent will disappear. Living the Constitutions or not doing so is to put theological fidelity in play. For a community born of a spiritual experience, approved by the Church, with a message of personal and collective sanctification and born to bring the message of the Gospel to humanity, especially to the poor, to not appreciate its Constitutions would be to reject the voice of God and, therefore, be theologically unfaithful.

## Prejudices against the Constitutions

16. A consideration of reasons for reading the Constitutions brings us to consider the possible prejudices, some already mentioned: whether or not the Constitutions are more theoretical than practical, whether they are utopian and unliveable; the large difference between the real behavior of the missionaries and what the Constitutions demand. For some there exists an impassible abyss which cannot be bridged. Certainly the style of editing has changed. They no longer are a list of prescriptions or an enumeration of tabulated obligations. They are more theological, and therefore, more motivating. But they demand responsibility and, if possible, the risk of passing from the theoretical and utopian to real life. The Constitutions, as we have said, are the rule of life. They exist to help overcome the human inertia and laziness, the divided spirit, the desire of change for the sake of change, lack of commitment and indifference.

17. There are symptoms which hide in their breast a bigger illness: not belonging unconditionally to the Congregation, the failure to value one's vocation and the Vincentian institutions. There can be lacking what St. Vincent held as certain: that *we all have brought to the Company the resolution to live and die in it, we have brought all that we are, our body, soul, will, talents, weakness and everything else. Why? To do what Jesus did. To save the world. How? By means of this union that exists among us and the offering we have made to live and die in this community and give it all we are and all that we do* (XI, 402). It is evident that if there is no belonging to the Congregation, then there is no interest in it, neither in its projects nor its norms, which are the support for everything else.

## A linear reading of the Constitutions

18. Convinced of the value of reading the Constitutions and the importance which they have in our life and apostolate, a possible way of reading and understanding them sufficiently is to read them like a book which is interesting for our life, apostolate and our own sanctification. This is what I consider a linear reading, which seeks to understand the text, the ideas contained in it and its purpose. This reading should be meditative and, done in God's presence, does not eliminate feelings and resolutions, or even true contemplation, from arising. A linear reading of Article 11 can lead one to contemplate the compassion of Christ for the crowd and how the origins of the signs that verify his word are found in his mercy.

## Beginning a guided reading of the Constitutions

19. The Constitutions are for all of the members of the Congregation. It is not necessary that everyone be a specialist in the themes that they cover. Nonetheless, the initial entry into them should be guided by a formator who is well prepared in the Constitutions, their history, their relation to St. Vincent's teaching, the history of the Company and ecclesial legislation. Every article has been the fruit of debates and differing opinions. Many of the articles are like small agreements, after having been put together from different points of view. In the *Ratio Formationis for the Internal Seminary* the study of the Constitutions is required in the context of the knowledge one should have of the Congregation.

20. This reading perhaps might not be enjoyable in the beginning, but can be profitable and pleasant in the measure that other social, ecclesial and historic elements are added to the understanding of the constitutional text. In this sense what has been done in some provinces is worthy of praise. Groups of missionaries from different age groups and employed in different ministries have come together for a few days, despite the urgency of their ministries, to read and reflect on them together, either as a whole or on specific aspects of them. In this same direction, the initiative of the Superior General to maintain the CIF in Paris, where the principal study is the Constitutions, and opening it to a larger number of missionaries, is laudable.

## A reading from the perspective of different key points

21. Having made the initial guided reading, other readings can be made from the perspective of different key points, for example: What figure of Christ is offered to us? Are they in harmony with the various conciliar documents or in what special way do *Perfectae Caritatis*, or *Apostolicam Actuositatem* or the post-conciliar documents like

*Evangelii Nuntiandi* or the *Apostolic Dimension in the Institutes of Apostolic Life or Fraternal Life in Common* have to do with the Congregation. So, from the initial reading lead by a formator, one comes to a knowledge ever more deep, wide and efficacious. The reading of key points can be done by any missionary who has the basic theological, apostolic and Vincentian knowledge.

### **A guide for and examen of missionary activity**

22. The eighth article of the Constitutions, although it refers to the spirit, can apply, without doing violence to the constitutional text, to their reading and study: *All the members should continually strive for a deeper knowledge of this spirit, by returning to the gospel and to the example and teaching of St. Vincent, mindful that our spirit and our ministries ought to nourish one another.* In other words, we cannot separate the knowledge of the Constitutions from living them. Theoretical knowledge aids the experiential knowledge, just as experiential knowledge justifies the theoretical. The Constitutions should be read, in whole or in part, when community projects are drawn up or evaluated.

### **Using criteria adapted from interpretation**

23. Above I said that the reading of the Constitutions can be done from the perspective of different key points so that it is more reflective and has more satisfactory results. They need to be interpreted. All interpretation has rules and criteria. I hold to the opinion that these criteria are most important, from the point of view of understanding the Constitutions. These are based in a global concept of the Constitutions, their end, their motivations and their structure. These criteria are those which, in my opinion, create the spirit proper and conducive to the correct and enjoyable reading of the Constitutions and the framework for, if that is the case, studying them; they point out the spiritual and psychological attitude necessary to approach them. In the same way, one can take into account the rules which are the technical means for uncovering and discovering the content of the texts.

24. As an example of a criterion for reading the Constitutions one can apply the finality of the Congregation; that is, the following of Christ, evangelizer of the poor. If to interest the complex legislation of the Church the *salvation of souls* is given as the chief criterion, in the same way it can be said that the whole constitutional framework of the Congregation is illuminated by its end: following Christ, the evangelizer of the poor. The Constitutions have not been formulated to replace the end of the Congregation, its grace or charism. The Constitutions have been approved by the Church to insure the spiritual patrimony of the Congregation, so that it can grow in an

ordered way and promote in the Church its spirituality, apostolate and its institutions according to the rhythm of the Mystical Body of Christ which is the Church.

### **Avoiding indifference to the Constitutions**

25. I do not believe that reading the Constitutions, or not reading them, is due to a lack of motives or means, but rather to something deeper, to the attitudes toward them. Understanding by attitude the interior stance, that of the heart, which we take to them. Joyfully and cordially accepted in principle, the impression one gets from some present writing and religious magazines is that constitutions in general have gone from being a key book, the Rule of Life, and are losing value and gaining in indifference, paralyzing, in a sense, the demand of remaining, in our case, in a permanent renewal as Article 2, cited above, establishes. Other themes of the consecrated life, of great theological importance, are studied and reflected with strength, interest and enthusiasm, but placing on the margins the theme of the Constitutions renewed since Vatican II. This indifference is not only a bad sign, but above all is evil because it makes us lose our Vincentian identity.

## **Praying the Constitutions**

### **Make the Constitutions our object of prayer**

26. *Lord, you who have sent your Son, model par excellence of dedicating oneself to the salvation of humanity, especially the poor, grant us, through the intercession of St. Vincent and the other saints of the Vincentian Family, the grace to put on the feelings and attitudes of your Son, and even more, of filling ourselves with his spirit to acquire the perfection of our Vincentian vocation and dedicating ourselves to the evangelization of the poor and helping clerics and laity so that they can, in their own vocations, participate in the evangelization of the poor (cf. Constitutions # 1).*

27. The prayer, presented above, is not from St. Vincent. It is simply the conversion of the first article of the Constitutions into prayer. I have followed in this St. Vincent himself who often ended his conferences and repetitions of prayer with a prayer asking God's grace to obtain what he, with the conviction of faith, had explained to his listeners, priests and brothers.

28. Fr. Dodin, in his book, *En prière avec Monsieur Vincent*, after having written a brief treatise on the prayer of St. Vincent and his behavior in this activity which was so important to him, has left us a selection of eighty-four prayers on such different themes as asking

for God's protection or obtaining the virtue of poverty. Fr. Luis Nos has done the same, choosing beautiful prayers from St. Vincent which he has adorned with his own literary gifts. In the themes for doing prayer in our communities frequently we go to St. Vincent to take from his writings which serve for prayer.

29. This first method of praying the Constitutions is easy. It is enough to present to God, through Jesus Christ, any of the spiritual, apostolic or community themes which are mentioned in the Constitutions.

### **Seeking the signs of God's Will and imitating Christ's availability**

30. For St. Vincent, prayer was not a way of separating oneself from reality, nor a subtle search for oneself. It was an expression of charity, a way of giving oneself to God and truly loving him. Although he is usually seen as a man of action — and he was — he was always conscious of God and his Divine Will. In Article 40 § 2, having before us the contemplative vision of Christ who remained in intimate communication with the Father, the Constitutions add: *We, too, sanctified in Christ and sent into the world, should try to seek out in prayer the signs of God's will and to imitate the responsiveness of Christ, discerning everything according to his mind. In this way our lives are changed by the Holy Spirit.*

31. This key for praying the Constitutions is the one which most might interest a missionary because, as St. Vincent said and the Constitutions repeat, prayer is the source of the spiritual life. By means of it one puts on Christ and is imbued with his evangelical teaching, discerns reality and events in God's presence and remains in his love and mercy. By this grace, the spirit of Christ lends efficacy to our words and actions. It is seeking a response to the Theresian question: *Lord, what do you want of me?*

32. The great motive we have for praying is that Christ prayed and asked us to pray in order to be faithful to the Father, supreme motive of his life, his mission and of his self-gift for the salvation of the world. Christ read and meditated on what was presented as the Father's will: the Scriptures, events, the mission. This keeps prayer from being separated from life.

### **A paraliturgical service**

33. According to Articles 45, 46 and 47 of the Constitutions, the prayer of the Congregation can be made and manifested in three different ways: liturgical, community and mental. The Constitutions can be prayed in these three ways, using them to make a type of paraliturgy. In this way, the Constitutions can be one of the readings

and also the source of the prayers of petition and the final prayer. It all depends on how the paraliturgy is organized and what content one wants to give it.

### **Community Prayer**

34. Community prayer is highlighted in the Constitutions in Article 46. *In community prayer we find an excellent way of animating and renewing our lives, especially when we celebrate the word of God and share it, or when in fraternal dialogue we share with one another the fruit of our spiritual and apostolic experience.*

35. This way of praying the Constitutions is simple and supposes that there exists in the community sufficient confidence to manifest one's thought and desires about the chosen theme. Once the constitutional text has been read, nothing hinders the president or some other person in the group from giving a few thoughts on the theme. After a suitable time of reflection, freely and spontaneously they can express whatever they have thought about the theme, always with charity and humility, without accusing anyone, with the intention of only being constructive.

36. This way of praying the Constitutions can serve as an examen of conscience and for charitably denouncing the serious faults which have been discovered in reflection. Obviously not all of the chapters of the Constitutions lend themselves to what is intended here. The good judgment of the superior, with the help of his companions, will help to use this method of praying the Constitutions. The situation of the community can be an indicator of whether or not to use this method.

### **Mental Prayer**

37. This way of praying the Constitutions consists in choosing a paragraph or chapter as the topic of mental prayer and for meditating on the Constitutions. I understand by meditation the silent and prolonged reflection on a spiritual theme. This is not merely an intellectual act because meditation is done in God's presence and inspired by his love and should end in a type of prayer of petition, of repentance or thanksgiving.

38. As much as possible, the many pieces of advice, related to the tradition of practical prayer, that St. Vincent gives about mental prayer have to be taken into account. Manuals of meditation, like those of Fr. Busée, were used by the missionaries. At the same time, he was concerned about the orientations of St. Francis de Sales, taking full advantage of resources of affectivity. According to Fr. Dodin, St. Vincent on principle did not prohibit any form of prayer nor give a preference for any one in particular. Everything

depended on the temperament, health, grace and the effectiveness of the method for the person using it.

39. Given the nature of the Constitutions, some more theological and others more practical, but all oriented toward the better following of Christ, it is necessary to give them a practical character, without inhibiting or smothering the feelings that might arise under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

### **Can the Constitutions be used like psalms?**

40. This question was asked of me awhile ago. On the one hand, it made me hesitate to make the Constitutions equal to the psalms as a starting point for prayer, not just for clerics and members of Societies of Apostolic Life but also for every Christian. In fact, there are many Christians who meet to sing the divine praises and pray the psalms. On the other hand, knowing the origin, composition and finality of the Constitutions and some communities, the idea of using them like the psalms seems to me neither naive nor to be discounted, if there is a person with poetic qualities who knows how to create the correct rhythm. The Constitutions can be used as a type of intermediate hour, if the liturgy permits, with a song, a short reading and a final prayer. This system, I believe has been used by groups in formation. This does not in any way give preference to a private psalmed prayer over the prayer of the Church.

41. When the Superior General has hinted at making prayer beautiful for God, he was referring, I believe, to the form; so that prayer, exteriorly beautiful in its content, songs and participation, might reach the sensitivities of young people, and also older people, without falling into an estheticism which would not be prayer no matter how beautiful the form. I believe that all prayer, made either in common or in private, in one way or another, is beautiful if it is done, as our Lord said, in spirit and truth.

42. I remember that during one of the assemblies, when nobody knew how to formulate the chapter on prayer and abundant ideas were offered, one of those present said to me: *All of this is fine, but the recommendation that the Church makes during the Eucharistic sacrifice would be enough: Pray, brothers.*



# Fidelity to the Constitutions

*by Hugh O'Donnell, C.M.*

*Province of China*

To write about fidelity to the Constitutions is as difficult as it is important. Others have a better vantage point from which to do so, but they are making different contributions to this volume. My credentials for undertaking this task are two: participation in five General Assemblies (1974-1998) and extensive, though by no means sufficient, experience of the Congregation worldwide from having traveled widely and gotten to know confreres locally. As I write from a limited viewpoint, it is my hope that my views will stimulate your own reflection on this important subject and lead you to a deeper and more critically comprehensive view of fidelity in the Little Company than the one presented here.

## **What does it mean to be faithful to the Constitutions today?**

During the first 33 years in the life of the Congregation the rules of the Congregation were tested and articulated through the give and take of daily experience. Then, for the next 325 years (from the distribution of the *Common Rules* by St. Vincent in 1658 until the confirmation of the *Constitutions* and *Statutes* in 1983) the Common Rules were our guide and inspiration. These were so deeply engrained in the minds and hearts of many confreres as the personal legacy of St. Vincent that it was not easy for some to let go of them and write our Constitutions and Statutes. With the approval of the Constitutions in 1983, the Common Rules kept a place of honor as part of our spiritual heritage but the Constitutions became our guide and rule of life. The full significance of this unprecedented and as yet unrepeatable event must be grasped in order to speak of fidelity.

If St. Vincent was the author of the Common Rules, the Congregation of the Mission was the author of the Constitutions and Statutes. If fidelity to the Common Rules meant fidelity to inherited norms, fidelity to the Constitutions and Statutes means fidelity to the spirit of St. Vincent in an evolving and transformed world. If we could sensibly feel the presence of Vincent in every word of the Common Rules, we sometimes today struggle to remind ourselves that our Constitutions and Statutes belong to the same order of emotive faith.



The fact that we ourselves wrote the Constitutions sometimes hides from us that it was as men of faith trying to tune into the voice of God and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that we wrote them.

The two greatest differences between the Common Rules and the Constitutions, it seems to me, are found in answers to the questions: Why were the Constitutions written? and How do they operate?

Why were the Constitutions written? They were written in response to the renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council. At the heart of that call was the overall *aggiornamento* of the Church. The basic issue was that the world had changed and the Church had fallen behind, or at least was not sufficiently in touch with the new world. On October 11, 1962, John XXIII when opening the Vatican Council expressed his conviction about the birth of a new world. His words easily resonate in the hearts of Vincentians. He said, "Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relationships." He was pointing to a world without violence, a world of true peace. Pope John felt for a long time the labor pains of the new world struggling with so much difficulty to be born.

The world had changed a great deal and was on the way to still more radical change. A profound cultural transformation was afoot. The stable, predictable and slowly evolving world of our predecessors was being transformed into a world of continual change opening up new ways for people to be together, a world of both unexpected promise and substantial danger. So, the Constitutions were written as an instrument of renewal, intending transformation and evangelical relevance in a much changed world. We were challenged in two directions: to reappropriate our charismatic roots, that is, the spirit of Vincent, and to be authentic apostles in the contemporary world. It is in this bipolar context that fidelity finds its meaning today, a meaning which is more complex and for that reason perhaps richer than in the past. Our fidelity is fidelity to the charism of Vincent *in a new world*.

The second question is: how do the Constitutions operate? They focus on the future rather than the past. They guide us into a future which is revealing itself to us one step at a time. They are thus oriented to the evolving mystery of God's historical and eschatological presence rather than to the customs and habits of traditional and religious regularity. They are an instrument of authenticity in a *world-in-creation*. They are an instrument of conversion.

They, therefore, actively involve the confreres, the local communities, the provinces and the general leadership in the twofold task of discerning the will of God in new circumstances and pro-actively planning a corporate response. This calls for a new way of acting and this new way of acting is found in the call for house and provincial plans and for corporate sharing of spiritual and apostolic experiences. Though we have struggled with house plans and provincial plans and may be frustrated because of only limited success in drafting and implementing them, they represent a radical departure

from previous ways of doing things. They acknowledge that the members of the house and the members of the province are in the best position to know the local and provincial situations respectively, to grasp the opportunities and needs and to respond effectively.

The development of these plans in their apostolic and missionary dimensions depend on the community life of the local house or province. This is why corporate sharing called for and fostered by C. 46 is also a cornerstone to the new way of doing things. It presents a vision of community in which confreres share not only a home, a common table and certain spiritual exercises but where confreres share their lives with one another. It presents a picture of personal relationships based on trust. We are encouraged and called to share with one another our spiritual and apostolic experiences as well as the Scriptures. This leads to the creation of a community of mutual knowledge, respect and cooperation, which in the end is capable of genuine discernment.

Fidelity is not only fidelity to the charism of Vincent in a new world, but also in a community on the move in this new world. The same house or provincial plan will not do from year to year and the experiences we share will also not be the same from one year to the next. If our Constitutions must be understood in relation to new times, then fidelity must be understood in relation to conversion. Our Constitutions call us by their nature to be open to ongoing conversion. In this light the basic conversion to which we are called is to let go of regret that the world is no longer the way it was and accept the world that God gives us today. Our conversion is to believe as unconditionally as possible that the Spirit of God sanctifies the world today and God speaks to us through the events and happenings of our lives. This is the heart and soul of Vincent's faith: God is here! "The event, that is God!" "God so loved the world...." And still does. Today. Here. Now.

Fidelity in this way has taken on a radically dynamic and contemporary meaning. We are called to discover and realize what it means to be faithful missionaries in our time, in our place, in a new world, with one another, as brothers, sharing our lives with one another, trusting in the mystery, here and now.

## **How can we be faithful to the Constitutions today?**

Fidelity is first of all a matter of the heart. Perhaps it is too obvious to remark that the primary means of fidelity to the Constitutions is love. Love of God and of our vocation; love of Vincent and the Congregation; love of the confreres and our co-workers; love of the poor and the clergy; love of the vocation of lay people and those called to lay ministries and leadership; love of strangers and those on the margins. When I was returning from the

General Assembly of 1980 I asked myself what I would respond to the confreres when asked what the newly drafted Constitutions said. I decided my shorthand for the nine weeks would be: love the poor, love the clergy, open our hearts to lay collaborators. If we can abide in this love, whatever our mistakes, we will be faithful to our vocation and the Constitutions which reveal its spirit, end and dynamics.

One of the greatest sufferings is to live with a divided heart. Jesus tells us we cannot serve two masters. He calls us to be single-minded and to have an undivided heart. "Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus," the author of Hebrews tells his struggling friends. If we have an undivided heart toward Jesus, our vocation, the confreres and the poor, we will be on the road of fidelity. This could also be called the virtue of simplicity in action.

Given the Jansenistic strains in our history and our formation, however, an undivided heart may not come to us easily, at least today. Integrating our humanity into our vocation so that our whole humanity is in the service of the gospel and love of neighbor is our central challenge. If we ignore this challenge or suppress it or rationalize it away, it will flatten out our affection for the people and our vocation and in their place invite danger if not crisis. St. Francis de Sales' humanity was a lifelong inspiration to St. Vincent. Vincent experienced his own humanity as problematic and found in Francis a spontaneous love, a gentleness and a humanity which amazed him and inspired him to pray for his own conversion. Vincent's melancholy and irascibility gave way to a humanity which was characterized by meekness and passionate love. Our fidelity must be incarnationally grounded, otherwise our efforts at fidelity will be in danger of backfiring.

At the heart of our humanity are relationships. St. Vincent was very wise when he called us to live "after the manner" of very dear friends. Since friendship is a gift, we cannot make it happen just because we want it. We cannot be friends with all the confreres and with all the people and with the poor. But our relationships with all these people should have the same human qualities seen in friendship. That is why Vincent says "after the manner of dear friends." Our relationships with the confreres are to be profoundly human, marked by genuine affection, trust, mutuality, joy and humor. Fidelity depends on the level of human communion in the community. These same human qualities mediate God's love in our relationships with co-workers and all those we encounter. Unaddressed loneliness and a lack of human intimacy have been among the reasons most often given for leaving our vocation.

Fidelity is further strengthened when we are willing to receive the gift of the poor. This is the paradox of our salvation. We obviously go to the poor or live among them because we have something we wish to share with them or because of something they need: the gospel or the necessities of life. But the real gift may be the

gift we receive from them. Frequently their faith, courage, dependence on God, affection and gratitude transcend ours and challenge our security and invulnerability. It can happen that their poverty invites us to face and accept our own poverty. For St. Vincent the poor first of all were understood theologically — from God's point of view. He knew the world was saved through the passion and death of Jesus and believed the ongoing salvation of the world was being accomplished in the passion of the poor. Where and how is Jesus redeeming the world today? Through the poor and those who suffer. So, in drawing close to the sufferings of humanity, especially of the poor, we draw close to the mystery of salvation in our day. Poor people are the Lord's gift to us in our vocation. If we receive this gift with open hearts, we will know a great joy that will ground our fidelity. Jesus himself recognizes the apostles and disciples as the Father's gift to him (Jn 17:6).

Interiority is a final key to fidelity. It has been said by Karl Rahner that in the future Christians will either be mystics or will not be Christians. William Johnston (*Inner Eye of Love*) has identified interiority as one of the pillars of living faith in the 21st century.

This interiority goes by many names: contemplative prayer, solitude, centering, mysticism, silence, emptiness, and mystery. Whatever angle we approach it from, I believe interiority is necessary for happiness in our lives, fruitfulness in our apostolates and perseverance in our vocation. My generation and some previous ones were shaped by Dom Chautard's *Soul of the Apostolate*, which put prayer at the heart of apostolate. Today we have many other guides. Nevertheless, it is Vincent himself who shows us the way to interiority. Today we understand more clearly how his spiritual path was shaped by Benedict of Canfield's *Rule of Perfection*. Knowing God's will through intimate friendship became the key to Vincent's spiritual way of not treading on the heels of providence. St. Vincent tells us that, being apostles with work to do, we cannot spend the whole day in prayer, so we settle for an hour each morning. The Constitutions when drafted in 1980 did not mention this. It was, however, restored by the Superior General and his Council after the Sacred Congregation required clearer and more specific norms for prayer. A commitment to interiority and fidelity to a daily hour of prayer is the foundation of our fidelity. The author of Hebrews exhorts his brothers and sisters, "Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus" (Heb 12:2).

## Are we faithful to the Constitutions?

The General Assembly of 1980 struggled throughout the summer, nine weeks altogether, to draft the Constitutions and Statutes. The devotion and energy of the members of the Assembly revealed how important the task was to them. The General Assembly of 1968-69, which had already labored over two summers on what turned out to

be an interim version of the Constitutions, labored in the same spirit of commitment. If seriousness is any portent of future fidelity, we can say that the omens were good.

To assess our fidelity to the Constitutions can only be done, at least by me, in a very general way. I will do it under four headings: acceptance, fruits (by their fruits you shall know them), questions and ongoing conversion.

**Acceptance.** Many provinces immediately accepted the Constitutions and moved to implement them with energy and enthusiasm. In some provinces, however, acceptance came more slowly. In particular, it took a while to understand the meaning of "Jesus evangelizer of the poor." Some found it difficult to distinguish between mission and works, between Part One on Vocation and Part Two, Chapter One on Apostolic Activity. Gradually, however, the whole Congregation accepted the Constitutions.

The full meaning of the Constitutions was not apparent from the beginning. Whether acceptance or understanding came first, both were necessary as a foundation for future fidelity. Workshops, articles, assemblies, retreats and reflection were some of the ways used by the provinces and houses to assimilate the meaning and understand the implications of the Constitutions. Eventually the Center for International Formation was established to deepen the appreciation of our Vincentian vocation in the lives of confreres 35-50. In its program the Constitutions are a primary formation tool. The same service is now being extended to confreres over 50 at CIF in Paris. Worldwide the formation of formators has received and is receiving special attention. In this case too the spirit and thrust of the Constitutions provide the foundation of the programs.

In brief, I think it can be affirmed with certainty that the Congregation has accepted the Constitutions and made them the foundation and operative standard of our vocation. I believe that, along with acceptance and gradual understanding, there has come a growing appreciation of the genius of the Constitutions and a growing conviction that the Holy Spirit was working along side the original drafters.

**By their fruits you will know them.** The best test of fidelity is to be found in the fruits the Constitutions have borne. Of these the most observable and remarkable is the way in which the entire Congregation has embraced Christ the Evangelizer of the Poor. As a Congregation we recognize and acknowledge that our vocation is to evangelize the poor. For some this was an easy enough journey, for others it was long journey which involved a change of mind and heart. The historical, cultural and economic circumstances of the various provinces played a significant role in the ease or difficulty confreres had in appropriating the symbol of following Christ the

Evangelizer of the Poor as the end of the Congregation. Though the implementation of our end varies from province to province according to circumstances, we have a common understanding across provincial, geographical and cultural boundaries when we speak of the end of the Congregation. This unity is perhaps the most notable fruit of our fidelity to the Constitutions.

A second area in which the fruits of fidelity are evident is the renewal and promotion of our apostolic works. Provinces around the world have had to deal with renewing established works, initiating new works and closing or leaving works no longer consonant with our charism (S. 1). The closings have been painful. It called for sacrifice and courage. Mistakes were made. Nevertheless, a clear pattern has emerged which reflects "...a clear and expressed preference for apostolates among the poor, since their evangelization is a sign that the kingdom of God is present on earth (cf. Mt 11:5)" (C. 12, 1). In our apostolates, established and new, confreres have also made an effort to share in some way the condition of the poor and have tried to let themselves be evangelized by the people (C. 12, 3). Attention has also been given to taking on apostolates where the confreres can live in community (C. 12, 4). The popular missions seem to have taken on new life in a number of provinces and some have experimented with adapted forms of presence among the people suitable to de-christianized areas. The renewal of the popular missions has involved the participation of laity, sisters and seminarians from outside the area and lay leaders from within the area. The early phase is often a "dialogue of life" among the people, followed by neighborhood organization and the use of local leadership. The heart of the mission is celebrated in many ways and there is a follow-up. These elements have given new life to the missions.

The Constitutions gave an honored place to international missions (called in the Constitutions "foreign missions" and "*missio ad gentes*" (C. 16). The Constitutions following Vincent's lead called all confreres to "readiness to go to any part of the world, according to the example of the first missionaries" (C. 12, 5) to preach the gospel or to be of service to the neighbor. The Congregation already has a long and distinguished missionary history. Still, a new phase of missionary energy emerged in response to the Superior General's invitation to volunteer for the international missions to answer the many requests the Congregation was receiving. The volunteers have been sent to Albania, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Cuba, Rwanda/Burundi, Kharkiv (the Ukraine), Siberia, Algeria, China, Bolivia, the Solomons and Tanzania. Individual provinces have also taken initiatives, for example, in the Cameroon and Kenya. This initiative tapped into an unexpected reservoir of missionary energy and provided a sense of global mission and international cooperation, which transcended the vision and capacity of individual provinces. The stimulus of the Constitutions and the prodding of the General Assembly of 1992 bore fruit well beyond



what was intended. Special attention has been given to priestly formation when possible.

The fruits of renewal in community life are harder to assess. One of the most evident fruits of the past 20 years, however, is the degree to which we have gotten to know one another across national and continental frontiers. Assemblies, international meetings, CIF, formation meetings and other forms of encounter have made it possible to know one another personally and in many cases to become friends. In this way we have also gotten to know what is happening in other provinces. We have also acquired a sense of being part of an international community, something not too long ago considered a liability, but now recognized as a great asset in a global world. Knowing our confreres from other parts of the world is experienced as a great blessing. This blessing perhaps also goes beyond what was foreseen in the Constitutions. Another remarkable fruit of these past 20 years (though I think this was always the case) is the respect and esteem shown toward the sick and elderly confreres. St. Vincent, as our Constitutions reflect, considered the sick and elderly confreres as a great blessing on the Congregation. In their faith and abiding interest in the mission of the Congregation they are esteemed and loved and in turn are a blessing on all our confreres and works. I believe this tradition is very strong among us. The Congregation is blessed in its elderly and infirm confreres.

A final fruit of these years is the increasing clarity about our identity as a community in the Church and in the world. With the Code of 1983 we finally found a positive place, our place, as a community of apostolic life. What is distinctive of communities of apostolic life is "the idea of being within the Church in the world with an apostolate or mission, while preserving a way of fraternal common life, a distinct spiritual life, a certain communality of goods, and a quest for Christian perfection ... in keeping with the specific apostolate and mission" (C. PARRES, "Societies of Apostolic Life: Canons 731-746," in *A Handbook on Canons 573-746* [Collegeville, 1985], 288). Within this framework we are self-defining, and we have been appropriating our own identity as followers of Christ Evangelizer of the Poor. A specific instance of clarifying our identity is found in our present understanding of the vows. Though our vows appear to be vows of religion they are not. In the General Assembly of 1980 and more clearly in 1992 we began to understand that the first vow is stability: a lifelong commitment to evangelizing the poor. The other vows are in consequence vows of missionaries not of monks. This has transformed our understanding of the vows and opened up their meaning to us in a way proper to our own vocation. A second aspect of our inherited identity, inherited from Vincent himself, is our secularity, which I will deal with below. So, one of the significant fruits of our efforts at fidelity to the Constitutions is a clarification and appropriation of our own proper Vincentian identity.

**Questions.** These questions may be understood as a judgment about areas in which we have not been faithful, but that is not my intention nor my competence. I present this part as questions in the hope that they will evoke answers that are helpful to our future fidelity.

**The World.** A characteristic of our evangelization according to C. 12, 2 is "attention to the realities of present-day society, especially to the factors that cause an unequal distribution of the world's goods, so that we can better carry out our prophetic task of evangelization." Pope John Paul II at the end of one of the assemblies challenged us to get to the roots of poverty. Have we really done this? I know our universities have been asked to address these questions and answer this challenge. We are preparing to lobby on behalf of the poor at the United Nations and someday may be able to do so before the European Union. In this we can benefit from the informed and professional representations done by the AIC before both these bodies. Still it requires a serious commitment of personnel and resources to understand the contemporary situation and draw up a plan of action. Historically this kind of study and research has been outside of and beyond our way of doing things. Yet it is not enough to point out the limitations of capitalism or neo-liberal economics. We are called beyond moralistic positions to understand what is happening and how we might effectively respond with and on behalf of the poor. Is this possible? Is it unrealistic? Is it outside the purview of our vocation? If it is not, how might we begin seriously to address these questions and bring the energies of the Congregation to the service of the poor at this level? Does this not have an intimate relationship with our secular character of being in the world and for the world?

**Education.** In 1980 the General Assembly wrote some beautiful and profound paragraphs on education as one of our works. Actually the paragraphs constitute a strategic plan when taken one phrase at a time. These paragraphs, however, are not in the Constitutions, but are Statute 11. Education was a contested issue during that and previous assemblies. This is not an attempt to revive that debate, but an effort to raise the question in a new context. In the General Assembly of 1998 the International President of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, when the Vincentian Family gathered with us in Assembly, spoke several times of the crucial role of basic education (the ability to read and write) in the advancement of the poor. He put before us the intimate relationship between education and poverty. What he said concerning basic education, I believe is true at other levels also. We know that what poor parents most want for their children is education. I wonder if the time has not come to ask ourselves this question: in the contemporary context is education not integral to the evangelization of the poor? I was recently in India and visited a school run by a confrere in which there were 2500 students, 96% of them Hindu. Their education will be a gift for life. Every



place is different, especially in terms of education, still do we not believe there is an intimate connection between education and human promotion?

**Community.** We have been reminded over the years that community is for mission. It is implied, or perhaps I have only inferred it, that mission is hard and community is easy. But I believe the opposite is most often the case. Mission is easier than living in community. I could have mentioned community above as a sign of fruitfulness and fidelity, because I have seen that the Congregation in the many places I have visited has made dramatic and continuing efforts at living our common life. This is seen in prayer, liturgy, living arrangements, sharing, fraternal relationships, joy and hospitality. Still I wonder if the level we have achieved reaches beyond religious observance to deeply human interaction. It is good that we have a circle of good, even intimate, friends outside the house as long as they are an extension of the intimacy of the community rather than a substitute for it. Some communities have achieved deep bonds of fraternal communion. Is there a felt need to deepen our bonds as brothers and confreres? Have we already achieved a sufficient level of fraternal communion?

**Prayer.** Many provinces and local communities have made significant efforts to foster a spirit of prayer and celebrate common prayer with devotion and dignity. Formation communities in particular have beautiful liturgies and give significant encouragement and support to the young confreres in formation for communal and personal prayer. From this point of view, prayer could easily have been listed as one of the fruits of fidelity to the Constitutions. Still we can be challenged by the following questions. Are we people of prayer? Are our communities known as communities of prayer? Are we as a Congregation known for our faith and prayer? Are we men of interiority? Are we teachers of prayer? What kind of prayer life do we promise new candidates. The answer to these questions, for the most part, is to be given by each of us in the secret of our hearts. I raise these question not to judge or assess our performance, but because there is a vast difference between being prayerful and being a people of prayer. St. Vincent was the latter and expects us to be also. When people ask me how is my Chinese, I answer in a common Chinese phrase, "I have a long way to go!" It is true of my Chinese and of my prayer too. Is there anything that will contribute more to our fidelity to the Constitutions than being men of prayer?

**Ongoing Conversion.** The final comment is only to observe that the Constitutions are an instrument of ongoing conversion. They were written at the command of Vatican II to address a new world. We continue to live in a dynamic historical situation and so our conversion must be ongoing. Someone has distinguished between horizontal and vertical freedom. Horizontal freedom involves decisions within my present world of meanings and values. Vertical

freedom involves decisions that move me on to a new world of meanings and values. Our ongoing conversion is a process that moves us on to new worlds of meaning and values, always however focused on following Jesus the Evangelizer of the Poor. This is another way of saying that our fidelity is not to past norms but to the present and future, to the new world opening out before us. Fidelity, like authenticity, is ongoing.

It is my hope that these reflections will lead to your own reflections on fidelity. Then, together let us thank the Lord for the gift of the Constitutions and for the many efforts to live faithfully to our vocation in following Christ the Evangelizer of the Poor.

# VINCENTIAN

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ROBERT P. MALONEY, C.M.

**Go!**

*On the Missionary Spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul*

Salamanca, Editorial CEME, 2000 (219 pp.)

Fifty years ago, this book of Father Maloney would have been called "On Being and Becoming a Missionary." It is a tribute to Father Maloney's insight that a collection of varied articles on the missionary spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul should bear the title "Go!," thus combining the command of Jesus with the urgency of missionary needs of the Church in the new millennium.

Depending on one's taste and orientation, one can savor the skillful interlacing of spirituality and literature, Papal documents and Vincentian ideals, the writings of the Church Fathers and the writings of modern theologians, history and the arts. All these show that spirituality is a many splendoured thing. And if one would like a taste of something new, one can read the original article "Models of 'Being Holy.'" The Vincentian Family members and other searchers of missionary spirituality will do well to read these pages of inspiration.

LUIGI MEZZADRI, C.M. - FRANCESCA ONNIS

**Storia della Congregazione della Missione, II/1**

*La Congregazione della Missione nel sec. XVIII:  
Francia, Italia e Missioni (1697-1788)*

Roma, CLV - Edizioni Vincenziane, 2000 (639 pp.)

This volume takes up the history of the Congregation of the Mission in a period of particular importance, the Eighteenth Century. It contains four parts. The first covers the government of the C.M. throughout the century. The reader will find in this section a

presentation of the various superiors general, beginning with the election of Nicholas Pierson in 1697 and ending with the generalate of Antoine Jacquier (1762-1788). The second part presents the evolution of the life of the C.M. in France during the Eighteenth Century. The third narrates events in the C.M. in Italy. The fourth section takes up the history of the foreign missions: Mascarene Islands, North Africa, the Middle East and Goa. This is the second volume of the history of the C.M. The readers have here a valuable tool for knowing our history.

WIESŁAW WENZ

**Prawno-teologiczne elementy charyzmatu Zgromadzenia  
Misji Wincentyńskiej do powstania pierwszych  
"Reguł Wspólnych" (1617-1655)**

Wrocław, Papieski Fakultet Teologiczny, 1999 (347 pp.)

This book in Polish, *Juridical-Theological Aspects of the Charism of the Congregation of the Mission up to the first Common Rules (1617-1655)*, is a doctoral thesis presented to the Pontifical Faculty of Theology of Wrocław. In this monograph, made up of four chapters, the author describes the process of the formation of the charism of the Congregation in the period before the publication of the Common Rules (1617-1655). The work especially highlights the specific elements (juridical-theological) of this charism, analyzing the text of the first Common Rules, contained in the manuscript known as the *Codex Sarzana* (cf. *Vincentiana* 4-5/1991, pp. 303-406).

GIUSTINO DE JACOBIS

**Scritti: 1. Diario**

Roma, CLV - Edizioni Vincenziane, 2000 (1079 pp.)

Promoted by the Visitor of Naples and compiled by Fr. Vincenzo Lazzarini and Dr. Mario Guerra, the *Diary of Justin de Jacobis* is presented in this jubilee year, when we also remember the second centenary of his birth and the twenty-five years since his canonization. It is not exactly a critical edition in the strict sense, but rather a *working document*, organized scientifically, based on precise and identifiable criteria. The original documents are manuscript pages, gathered together in six volumes, which make up the different sections of the work. The Italian in them belongs to the Nineteenth Century and the expressions have been maintained intact to respect the style. The diary form gives the narrative the vivacity and

missionary inspiration that made *Abuna Yaqob Miriam* famous for his eloquence and undeniable capacity for fascinating his listeners. He offers us — at a time when the Church after the Second Vatican Council has opened itself to dialogue — a vision built on the complementary nature of cultures and religions, supported by a mutual interchange, communion in the spiritual riches of the Christian community, inculturation and global mission. This is not only the testimony of a true forerunner of the new evangelization, but also the witness of a saint for our days, a Christian for our times who, with the strength of love, disarms and conquers all.

#### COLLECTION

### **Le Missioni Popolari della Congregazione della Missione nei secoli XVII-XVIII**

#### ***II - Documenti***

Roma, CLV - Edizioni Vincenziane, 1999 (165 pp.)

In continuity with the first volume — Studi (cf. the summary in *Vincentiana*, no. 3, May-June 2000, p. 211) — this volume, dedicated to the documents on the theme of the parish missions in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, now appears. It is the result of a selection of important material for understanding the significance of the parish missions in Italy during these centuries.

#### COLLECTION

### **La Familia Vicenciana ante el Tercer Milenio. Caminos de futuro**

Salamanca, CEME, 1999 (461 pp.)

This book contains twelve conferences and seven workshops dealing with texts which were presented to the Vincentian Family on the topic of the Twenty-Fourth Week of Vincentian Studies of Salamanca. Fundamental points like: the charism, vocation, mission, evangelization, service of the poor, new areopagi, prayer and community life are examined in detail from the perspective of the new millennium. All of the presenters agree that we are entering a new era which requires fidelity, creativity and continual conversion. If we look to the past, it is not to be anchored to it, but rather to throw ourselves into the future with a confident audacity.

**CARLO RICCARDI, C.M.**

**Spiritualità Vincenziana.**  
**Contributo allo studio del Vincenzianesimo**  
*II Edizione*

Roma, CLV - Edizioni Vicenziane, 2000 (158 pp.)

The author offers the Vincentian Family, especially the laity, a guide for knowing and deepening the spirit which inspired St. Vincent in his relationship with God and the neighbor. He develops Vincentian spirituality in five chapters: 1) The Vincentian inspiration; 2) The Christocentric humanism of St. Vincent; 3) Tools for undertaking the works; 4) Notes for a Vincentian spirituality; 5) Validity and timeliness of being Vincentian.

**GIOVANNI BURDESE, C.M.**

**Dall'essere nella carità al vivere la carità**  
*Principi di spiritualità e linee metodologiche  
 per la Famiglia Vincenziana*

Roma, CLV - Edizioni Vicenziane, 2000 (140 pp.)

This work offers a Vincentian reading of the mystery of the Incarnation and grace. It presents charity, not only as a method and essential element in the relationship with God, but also as a condition for entering into relationship with every person. This study is made up of three chapters: 1) The Christ of St. Vincent: Missionary of the Father and Evangelizer of the poor; 2) Principles of spirituality, Principles for Vincentian action; 3) Methodological and Practical guidelines for Vincentian evangelizers today.

**JEAN-PIERRE RENOARD, C.M.**

**Prier 15 jours avec Saint Vincent de Paul**

Montrouge, Nouvelle Cité, 2000 (128 pp.)

This is a small volume which treats the spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul in fifteen short meditations. The first three help to deepen our faith starting with the saint's experience. The next six explain the deep conversion of heart by which St. Vincent lived totally given to God and the poor and which guides us as we follow him. The motor of his life is prayer, according to the next three meditations. The final

three introduce us to his love for the priesthood, for the virtues and for an ecclesial work lived in collobaration.

**JOSÉ EVANGELISTA SOUZA, C.M.**

**Província Brasileira da Congregação da Missão:  
180 años dos Lazaristas no Brasil**

*Dados históricos e reflexões sobre a atuação dos Lazaristas  
da Província Brasileira da Congregação da Missão*

Belo Horizonte, Santa Clara, Editora Produção de Livros Ltda, 1999  
(157 pp.)

This book presents, in a concise and critical way, the work done by our confreres in Brazil for the last 180 years. It is structured around five chapters: 1) Pre-history of the province 2) First Period: The Portuguese Hegemony (1820-1845); 3) Second Period: The French Hegemony (1845-1900); 4) Third Period: The Brazilian Hegemony (1900-1960); 5) Fourth Period: (1960-1999). This is a significant effort to rescue and appreciate the work of so many Vincentian missionaries in the land of Brazil.

**JOSÉ BARCELÓ MOREY, C.M.**

**Hombres y apóstoles en la costa norte hondureña**

*La Congregación de la Misión (PP. Paúles) de la Provincia de  
Barcelona en la Costa Norte de Honduras*

Honduras, 1999 (362 pp.)

This book, because of its many historical notes, might be taken as the first draft of what could be the history of the Congregation of the Mission in Central America. We find in this work a vision of the birth of the Christian faith on the Atlantic coast of Honduras and the development of religious life among its people. In reading this book one discovers the providential coincidence of three circumstances which united the Province of Barcelona with the Church of Honduras: 1) the great concern of the Holy See for the evangelization of Central America, especially the area of Honduras; 2) the concern of Bishop Martínez y Cabañas for the department of the Caribbean because of its spiritual abandonment and lack of priests; 3) the precise moment lived by the Province of Barcelona, charged with a missionary impulse.

(JOHN PRAGER, C.M., translator)

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